PlayStation 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

OCTOBER 2010

The Official Magazine

DEAD SPACE 2
VS.
DEAD RISING 2

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 37 (October 2010)

WORLD-EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON

STAR WARS THE FORCE UNLEASHED II

Now with 100% more Yoda!

Reviewed
Kingdom Hearts: Birth By Sleep

Revealed
Warhammer 40K: Space Marine

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

MATURE 17+
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Intense Violence
Partial Nudity
Strong Language

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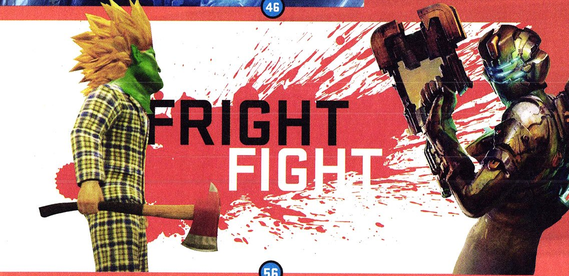
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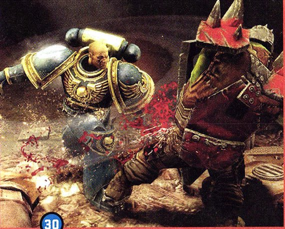

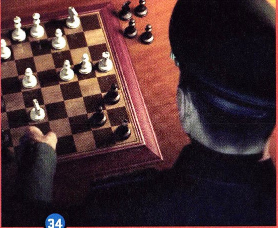

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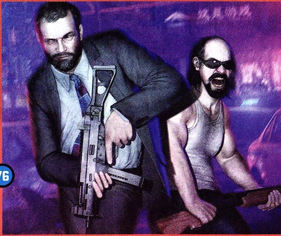

➔ Gary Unleashed?

Here's what my life might be like if my life were more like *The Force Unleashed:* I'd start my day powerfully. I'd bound out of bed fully awake, immediately able to defeat everything from morning breath to an unruly toaster oven to my god-awful commute. I'd enter the office ready to bend all game publishers to my will and able to destroy any bad games that stand in my way. I'd then dash home and use my fully developed Jedi powers to mind trick some TV execs into putting something decent on (hey, it's Monday night), then beat every game that ever existed on my first try.

In other words, my life would be boring.

There's a narrative arc to both games and life that goes a little something like this: start weak, work hard, get stronger, suffer setbacks, get even stronger…and perhaps, eventually, win. Without that struggle, everything is a bit less exciting. Much as we decry our everyday grind, it's what makes life interesting.

Which is why I'm so fascinated by *The Force Unleashed.* That game turned our hobby on its ear by giving us fully formed Force powers right from the start, then setting us off on a quest to hunt down some of the strongest Jedi in the galaxy. In short, it fulfilled our ultimate power fantasy without making us work to get there.

And now we have *The Force Unleashed II*. As our world-exclusive playtest reveals, Starkiller once again begins with a range of powers usually reserved for mid- to late game, and yet again uses these powers with giddy abandon to dispatch an endless onslaught of foes. It's a setup that simply wouldn't work in most games—but thanks in part to the *Star Wars* universe, it feels perfectly fitting here.

Now, if only I could use some of Starkiller's Force powers to fix that annoying toaster oven of mine…

GARY

Gary Steinman | Editor in Chief

www.twitter.com/TinyManRages

The Team ↘

GARY STEINMAN
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Among Gary's many glorious initiatives, only pantsless Tuesday and ravenous platypus birthday surprises have proven less than successful. But as he says, no great magazine was ever made without some broken eggs and platypus attacks.

NOW PLAYING: *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II, Shank, KH: Birth by Sleep*

GREG ORLANDO
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

A lifetime's worth of filing nuisance lawsuits and sending vaguely threatening letters to cereal companies has hardly prepared plucky editor Greg for his new career: yodeling for nickels. He is currently missing, but presumed lemony-fresh.

NOW PLAYING: *Dead Rising 2, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

Let's face it; art needs a lot of direction. Otherwise, it'd totally eat babies and spill meatloaf on the rug. So while Ken can direct art in his sleep, he doesn't because he can't bring his bed into work. Beds belong at home, people!

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA Soccer 11, Pro Evolution Soccer 2011, Split/Second*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

The bold, pioneering spirit of managing editor Roger "Rog" Burchill promises a brand-new era of good feelings. Unless, of course, the copy is late. Then, it's nothing but scaldings for the ever-suffering intern.

NOW PLAYING: *Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days, NCAA Football 11, Blur*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Scott didn't go to the prom. The prom came to him. Democrats vote for Scott, and it's said the Easter Island statues are all of Scott, but the natives are so untalented at stone carving, it's hard to tell.

NOW PLAYING: *Dead Space 2, Dead Rising 2, DJ Hero 2*

THE DAVID MURPHY
OUTGOING INTERN

When the end is nigh, and *Manimal* has been canceled for eternity, rest easy knowing the brain of super-intern David Murphy will live on by card counting in Vegas casinos. Thanks for the great work, David.

NOW PLAYING: *Tactics Ogre, random Japanese PS2 games*

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The Official Magazine

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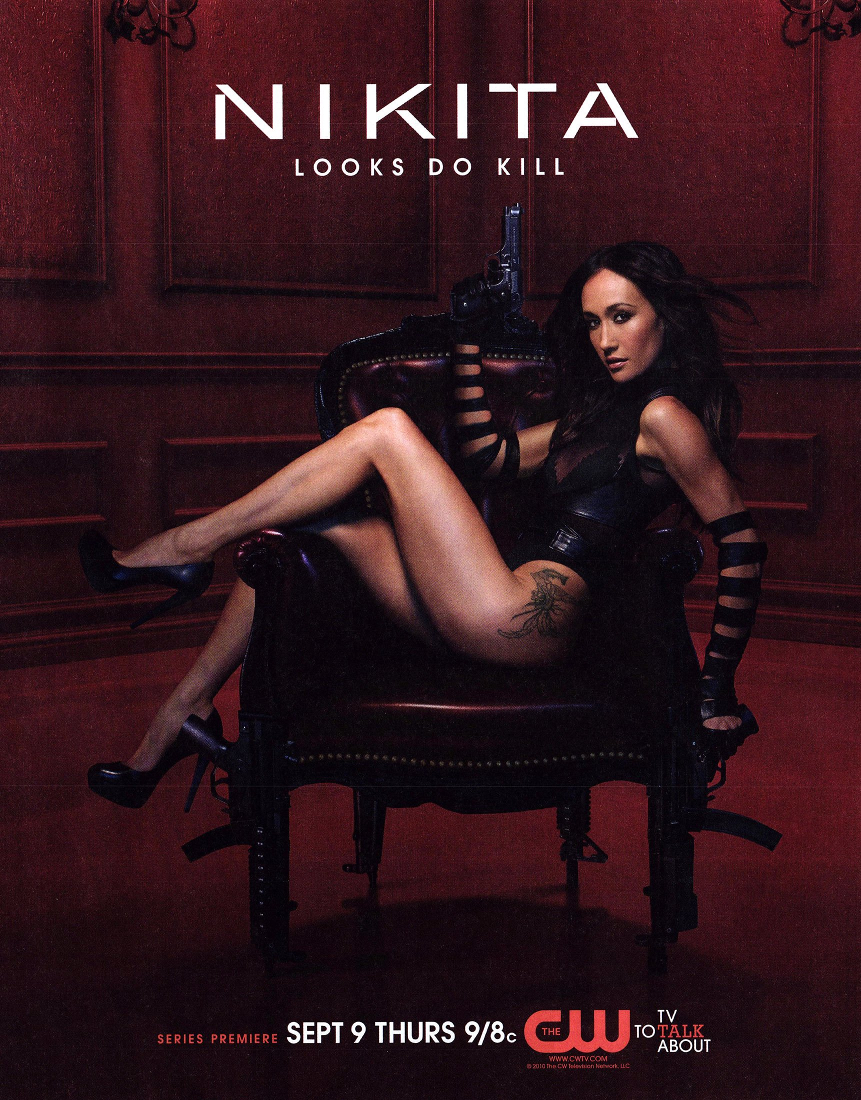

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The Ten

Stories that everyone's talking about

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SOCOM takes on Sony's motion controls
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Crossover!
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1

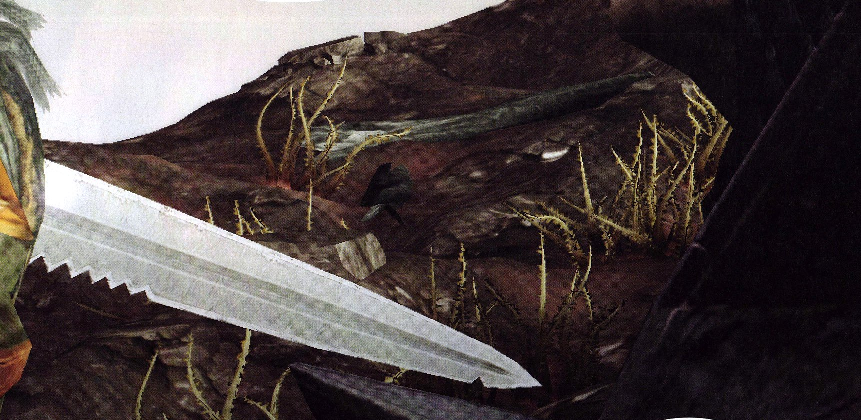
Dawn of a New Age

One origin ends and another begins in *Dragon Age 2*

We've defeated the archdemon, liberated a devastated Ferelden, and driven the darkspawn back into their filthy hole. In short, we prevented the apocalypse. Great job, Grey Warden, but now it's time for us step aside—bigger things are happening than our small-potatoes story.

Dragon Age: Origins absolutely absorbed us with its rich lore, dark fantasy setting, and the character-defining consequences accompanying lose-lose dialogue decisions. However, this introductory story pales in comparison to its ambitious and exciting sequel. *Dragon Age 2* is an origin story as well, albeit considerably more epic in scale.

We were skeptical about BioWare forcing us into the role of an established character, but *Dragon Age 2* is a decidedly different adventure than its predecessor. The story of human hero Hawke—now fully voiced instead of silent and expressionless—spans an entire decade, and details his (or her) ascension to the role of the champion of Kirkwall. The tantalizing part? The "why" and "how" of the game's epic events warp around the massively



branching narrative, which radically changes based on how our choices shape entire countries, races, and people.

Where the first game's country of Ferelden seemed sizable, it's a mere fragment compared to the sprawling continent of Thedas in *Dragon Age 2*. As we explore Thedas' numerous nations and uncover the truth behind Hawke's reverence, we'll also discover the political, religious, and economical ramifications of our actions in *Origins*.

But don't worry about being new to the series—BioWare wants to ease as many players into its engrossing world as possible, so sinking 60 hours into the original isn't mandatory. The most alluring way of attracting new role-players—aside from the gorgeous graphics and a revamped art style—is with the refined combat. The philosophy here is faster and funner, which immediately solves our issues with *Origins'* chance-based die rolls. *Dragon Age 2* sounds like a more readily accessible action role-playing game than its predecessor, but also a bigger one: By the end of it, BioWare promises, we'll have changed the entire world.

No pressure.

2

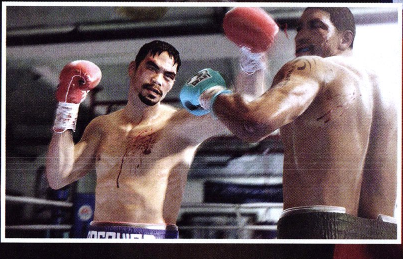
Knock out

Lace up those gloves—*Fight Night's* about to get messy

The bruised, bloody visage of Manny Pacquiao says it all: *Fight Night Champion*—the fifth installment in Electronic Arts' celebrated boxing franchise—won't pull any punches. According to the development team at EA Canada, *Champion* focuses on a darker, seedier side of the sport, which means unflinching brutality and a novel single-player experience attempting to capture all the drama and emotion of championship boxing.

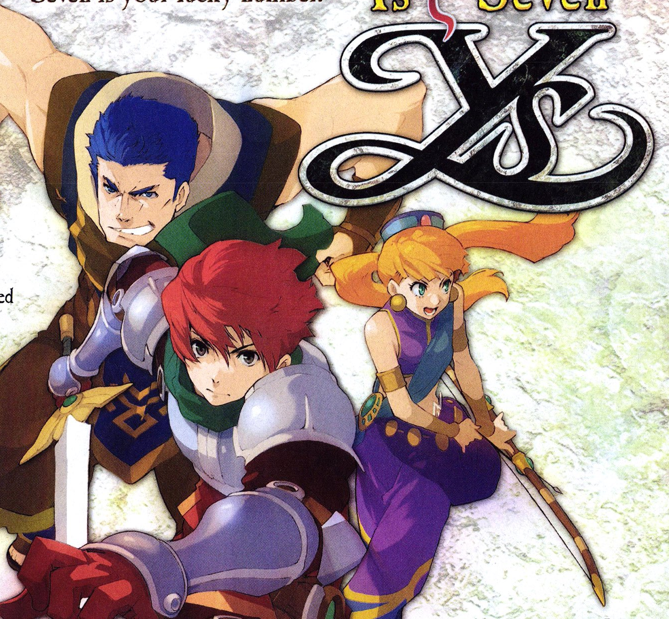
The game will also introduce a new Full Spectrum Punch Control system that's "the most realistic punching system ever seen" despite the fact the overall game will be "the most user-friendly title in the franchise's history." If the new system borrows anything from EA's other sports titles, it may broaden players' attack range, eliminating the concept of low-, mid-, and high punches by offering attacks from any incremental point in between. But we're speculating.

Regardless of how the new system works, amateur pugilists can start beating more than 60 real-world fighters to a bloody pulp when *Champion* ships in 2011. Ready to rumble?



Seven is your lucky number.

Ys Seven



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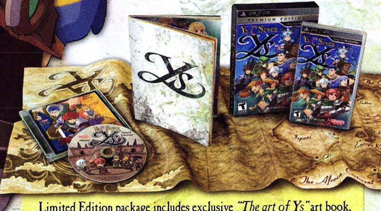

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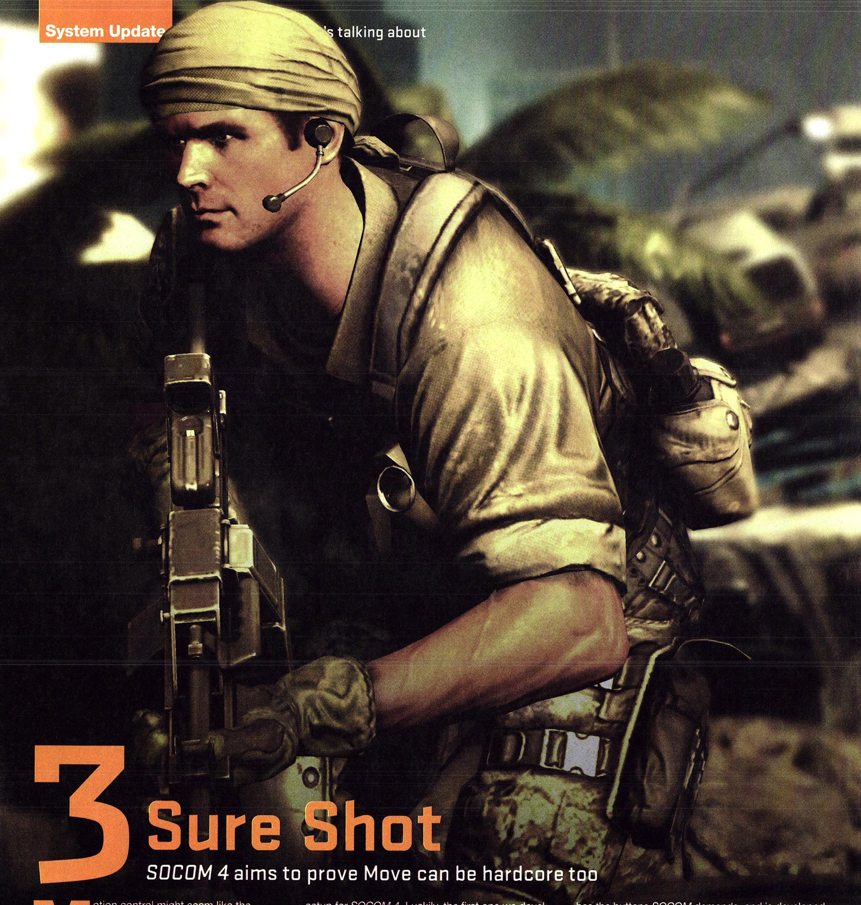


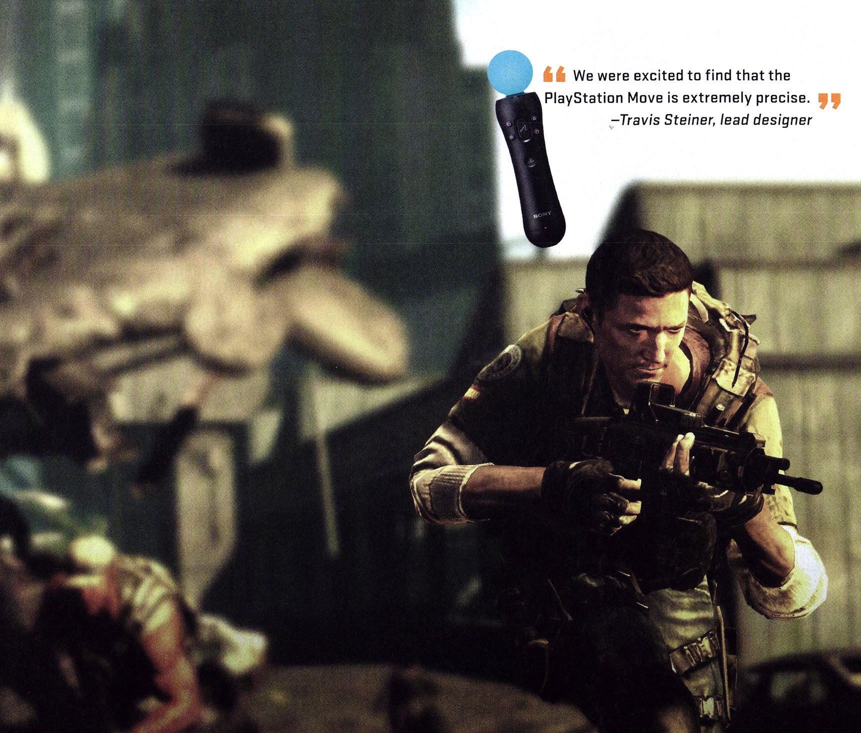
3 Sure Shot

SOCOM 4 aims to prove Move can be hardcore too

Motion control might seem like the domain of the casual gamer, but Move's 1:1 tracking ability says otherwise. We caught up with Travis Steiner, lead designer on SCEA's 2011 release *SOCOM 4*, to find out how Move works with a "real" shooter.

Tell us what you think about PlayStation Move.
We've found Move to be incredibly intuitive. I personally thought we would have to experiment with several different approaches before deciding on the best setup for *SOCOM 4*. Luckily, the first one we developed turned out exactly as we had hoped. In general, it has just been a lot of fun for everyone on the team to experiment and play with the new hardware.

But you had to be a bit anxious about getting Move to work with your game...
Previous attempts to develop a serious shooter with motion controls seemed to be plagued by poor precision and a lack of buttons. We were excited to find that the PlayStation Move is extremely precise, has the buttons *SOCOM* demands, and is developed in a way that maintains the full graphical power of the PS3. Once we had a prototype up and running, it was clear the Move would be a great fit for *SOCOM 4*. The interface is extremely easy to use, enabling even the most casual of gamers to wage warfare and command troops with deadly effectiveness. At the same time, the accuracy and responsiveness of the Move controller makes it a viable option for hardcore players who may have been hesitant to use motion controls.



> “We were excited to find that the PlayStation Move is extremely precise.”
> —*Travis Steiner, lead designer*

Does the motion controller allow for any new gameplay options that wouldn't be possible on a traditional gamepad?
Our overall mission has been to make *SOCOM 4* fully playable for people who own either the DualShock or Move. Because we're supporting both formats, we want to keep all game-critical actions available to either controller. That said, Move provides a much more interesting way to perform those actions. It also certainly does allow for creative control methods the DualShock cannot perform, but we prefer to utilize those aspects in a way that doesn't offset the competitive balance.

Can you describe what the motion controls will allow us to do in the game?
When the Move is used with *SOCOM 4,* the reticule is detached from the center of the screen, allowing players to aim freely. As the reticule approaches the screen borders, it turns the camera. We've found this not only works very well for moving and shooting, but also for commanding teammates. The amount of movement needed to control *SOCOM 4* is very slight. The game can easily be played while relaxing on the couch and doesn't require you to break a sweat—though you probably will once the bullets start flying. Most of our efforts have been directed toward the core mechanics, but we're also now starting to experiment with quick gesture-based actions such as a melee attack.

Do you feel the motion controls make *SOCOM 4* a better game, or is the experience simply a different one?
The game is a lot of fun with either controller, but it's very exciting to play a shooter with a new control mechanic that works so well. Based on the demos that we've hosted, the Move appears to be a much a more intuitive control setup for casual gamers and PC “mouse and keyboard” enthusiasts who never fully mastered the DualShock-style gamepad.

***SOCOM* is a relatively hardcore franchise with a deeply devoted fanbase. Are you at all concerned about how the community will react to the new system? Actually, how *has* the community reacted?**
We were initially concerned that our fans would think we'd abandoned the DualShock. This is why it was extremely important for us to get the message out early that *SOCOM 4* supports both controllers. Many hardcore fans still have doubts about whether they will switch to the Move. I can tell you though that nearly every skeptic I've witnessed has come away really liking it after playing it themselves.

What else can you tell us about *SOCOM 4?*
SOCOM 4 is a major evolution of the franchise. We're putting a great deal of effort toward a cinematic single-player experience while also maintaining the core franchise pillars of teamwork, authenticity, and innovative multiplayer. We're not unveiling many specifics of the online play just yet, but I can tell you that *SOCOM 4* will feature exciting new team-based game modes and support up to 32 players.

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4 Here Comes a New Challenger

The world's top two fighting franchises collide in *Street Fighter X Tekken*

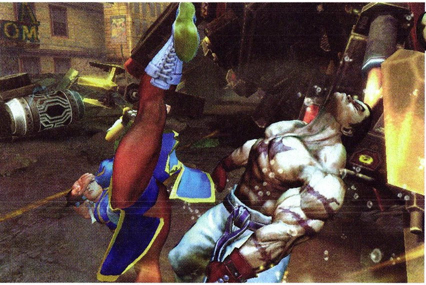
Ever since the first *Tekken* arcade unit brushed up against a quarter-munching *Street Fighter* cabinet, there's been a direct rivalry between fans of each franchise. To this day people still argue about which series is better. Is it *Tekken,* with its 3D graphics and emphasis on close-quarters combat? Or does the honor belong to the 2D perfection of *Street Fighter?* Pretty soon, we won't have to rely on fanboy flame wars for the answer.

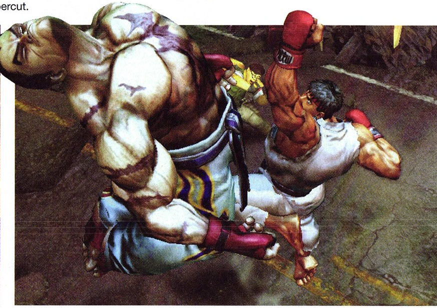
The newly announced *Street Fighter X Tekken* (pronounced "cross" *Tekken)* combines both killer franchises into one face-caving package, finally giving us the chance to pit iconic characters Ryu and Kazuya Mishima against each other. We've seen a brief gameplay demo, and even though it was fleeting and incomplete, we were able to identify some important gameplay distinctions.

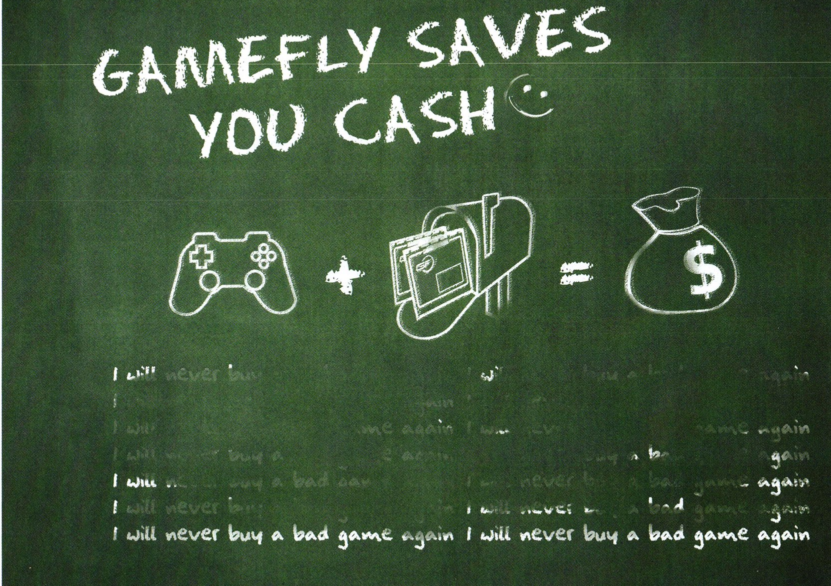
First, this looks and plays more like *Street Fighter* than *Tekken,* with fighters duking it out on a 2D plane instead of the latter's rotating 3D arenas.

Second, this new game features tag-team play. We saw Ryu call in Chun-Li, who busted out a flashy combo then leapt away as Ryu fired off a huge fireball at a staggering Kazuya. Conversely, Kazuya brought in Nina Williams to subdue Ryu with a quick attack, leaving him open to Kazuya's devastating electric uppercut. The ability to tag in other fighters means immense combo opportunities, but purists needn't worry, as *SFXT* won't go to the screen-shattering extremes of *Marvel vs. Capcom 3.*

Both Capcom (which is developing the game) and Namco admitted *SFXT* was far out, suggesting even 2012 as a release date. Even stranger was the news that Namco will later make its own *Tekken X Street Fighter,* which will act as a counterbalance by putting Capcom's characters into a 3D fighting game. After all, one side can't let the other claim superiority. Not with all those frantic fanboys to please.



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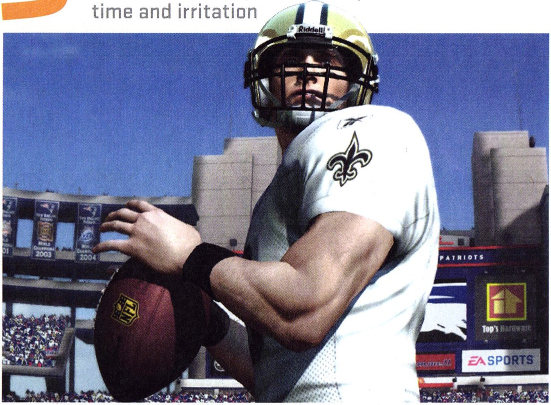
5 Half-time

Madden NFL 11's GameFlow system saves time and irritation



"Drew Brees has his helmet on, ready to receive the plays from his offensive coordinator up in the booth. What do you expect today, Bob?"
"That's right, Bob, he'll get the plays piped straight into his ear, through the headset, courtesy of the new GameFlow system."

"What's the purpose, Bob?"
"Well, Bob, it's about pacing and time. Brees has a massive playbook at his fingertips, but we all know that he uses just a fraction of those plays in a game, the ones he's most comfortable with running."

"So how does that speed up the game, Bob?"
"Well, Bob, it saves rummaging through pages and pages of plays, and focuses on just the core plays the coordinator has teed up for most situations."

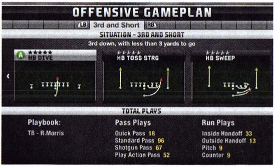
"What if Brees sees the defense lined up to put a ton of pressure on the play that's called in?"
"In that case, Bob, he can still call an audible from a range of plays he's set up prior to the game for all the potential situations he might face on the field."

"Seems like the coordinators take it pretty easy on the quarterback or defensive captain when they call in these plays, Bob, no yelling or cussing."
"That's right, Bob, they keep it clean, for the kids. We heard that at one point the coordinators would give encouragement, or berate a botched effort, but it was considered lame, so they keep it clean."

"But they do give tips, right?"
"Oh, they help by giving pointers on when to time releasing a pass to a receiver on a timing play, when they might break for space, or to remind the backs to follow blockers. They seem like nice people, these coordinators."

"Well, Bob, we appreciate the pace pick-up that this GameFlow system seems to have managed."
"Indeed we do, Bob, it's virtually halved the amount of time it takes to get through a game if you just follow what the coordinator is piping in to your noggin."

"What are we going to do with all the time we'll get back, Bob?"
"Play more games I guess, Bob, or hit the bar... Yeah, let's hit the bar."



OFFENSIVE GAMEPLAN

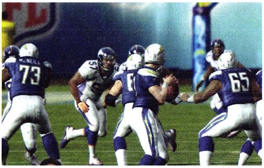
LB 3rd and Short RB

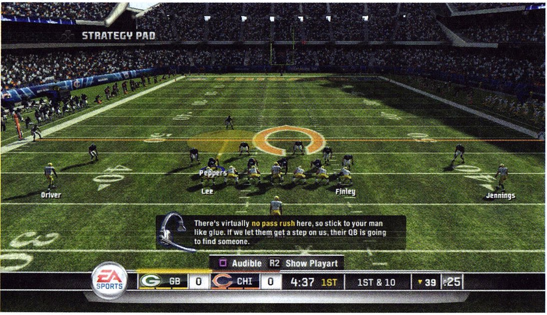
SITUATION - 3RD AND SHORT

3rd down, with less than 3 yards to go

TOTAL PLAYS

Playbook:	Pass Plays	Run Plays
TB - R.Morris	Quick Pass 18	Inside Handoff 33
	Standard Pass 96	Outside Handoff 13
	Shotgun Pass 67	Pitch 9
	Play Action Pass 52	Counter 9





STRATEGY PAD

There's virtually no pass rush here, so stick to your man like glue. If we let them get a step on us, their QB is going to find someone.

Peppers
Lee
Finley
Driver
Jennings
□ Audible R2 Show Playart
GB 0 CHI 0 4:37 1ST 1ST & 10 39 :25

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NFL PLAYERS

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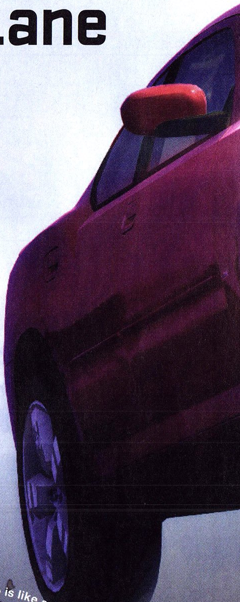
6 Life in the Fast Lane

Five reasons why *Test Drive Unlimited 2* isn't just a racing game, but a way of life



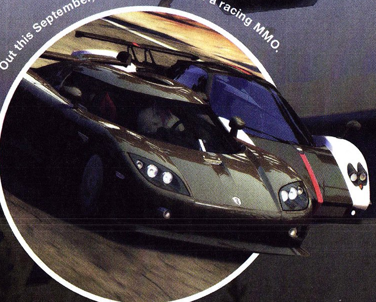
1 It's not just for car nerds...

Whether we want to explore the landscape, set up money-making challenges, race, or just free-roam, *Test Drive Unlimited 2* will reward us with lots of goodies, including stuff to fill the game's mansions.

Racers start off in a slightly exotic living space, before getting promoted to rock star status.

2 ...but it's still great for car nerds

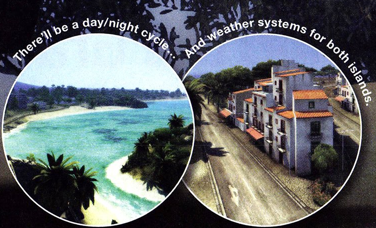
Unlimited 2 is packed with real-life vehicles, from Lamborghini to Land Rover. It's possible to inspect a car's leathery insides, tweak the specs, and even lower soft-tops mid-race. Cars can sport custom paint jobs and designs that can be shown off online.



Out this September, Atari's game is like a racing MMO.

3 Build a racing team

Become the chairman of a 32-man club, complete with bank balance and exclusive cars. Looking for a more *intimate* experience? Special friends can sit in the passenger seat and offer directions back to their custom villa.



There'll be a day/night cycle...

And weather systems for both islands.

4 Coat cars in filth

The first *Test Drive Unlimited* let us drive off-road but it felt like we were navigating a three-wheeled shopping cart over an ice mountain. This time around there are specific off-road cars and paths, and a revamped handling model providing depth of control and a unique feel for each car.

5 It's absolutely huge

The first game offered Oahu—the Hawaiian island—in its entirety. *Unlimited 2* starts by restricting us to the *whole of Ibiza* before unlocking the airport and letting us travel back to our old Hawaiian haunt. It's also cool to sail to Hawaii in a private yacht, with built-in garage and jacuzzi. No really.

7
the △○×□ Tester
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$ 5,000.0
five thousand ******************* doll
008675 000309 8558

Making the Grade

Will Powers won the first season of PSN reality-show *The Tester*, and now he's ready to work

You're blessed with a cool name, so why choose "Cyrus" as your *Tester* name?
We wanted to go by different names on the show to make it more gaming-related, and that's the handle I use in the online community, because Will Powers is taken a lot of the time.

Looking back over the show, what would you consider your high point?
Just meeting everyone, getting to know everyone on the show—almost a year later, I still keep in contact with the majority of them. On a strictly event basis, I think the *Buzz* challenge was probably my favorite because it allowed us to showcase our specific knowledge of the industry and of gaming.

Your lowest or most embarrassing moment?
The episode where I underperformed in the ninja challenge, which was a letdown. But also the role-playing challenge—that was more of a letdown because I felt like I let my team down, and the team leader had to suffer because we underperformed.

How has the show actually prepared you for the job of being a tester?
That's obviously one of the main critiques of the show. I think one of the mundane challenges, the first one where we were just spotting the differences, may have been the most pertinent to the job.

Think about it this way: They're looking for general skills. They want someone who's going to have good communication with people on a team basis, even if they're under pressure.

As with any job, being a tester must have its ups and downs...
You hear people say that testing ruins games for you. That's not necessarily true, but when you put over 700 hours into a game, you don't want to touch it for a little while afterward.

The show glamorized the notion of being a tester, but it's not that glamorous a job is it?
It doesn't really glamorize the job as much as the industry. The people [on the show] work in jobs they don't like and want to get into an industry they are passionate about. I think that's one of the most misunderstood portions of the show. Almost everyone in the show was a college graduate, and because of the economy we were working random jobs—if we were lucky enough to have jobs. I was a bartender and oyster shucker with a Japanese degree. But on the side I was running a blog, writing reviews, and trying my hardest to get into the games industry. I saw this as an opportunity to propel myself into it.

What's the most interesting bug you've squashed so far?
I can't speak specifically, but when you figure out what causes an issue that you've been researching and researching for hours, then you send it off and the developers fix it, you're like, "Oh, they actually listened to me and the game's going to be better because of my work." That's really gratifying.

8

Better Red Than Dead

Codemasters continues the fight with *Operation Flashpoint: Red River*

Ambitious in scope and authentic in nature, last year's *Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising* was meant to be a realistic, thinking-soldier's alternative to twitch military shooters like *Call of Duty.* But victory proved elusive for *Rising* as uneven execution ultimately betrayed it on the battlefield. Now new intel indicates Codemasters is rearming for a 2011 counteroffensive with *Operation Flashpoint: Red River.* Here's how *Red River* intends to change the tide of war:

Welcome to Tajikistan Bust out a globe and check: Tajikistan is the proverbial hard place that's surrounded by China, Afghanistan, and former Russian republics. The Surgh Ob (Red River) region offers a variety of challenging new environments for field operations or close-quarters in-town fighting against insurgent guerillas and the Chinese army.

Into the Fireteam *Red River's* single-player or co-op squad-level approach should make for a more immediate and focused gameplay experience. Assume the role of a fireteam leader or become a grenadier, rifleman, automatic rifleman, or scout to earn experience in combat to acquire new skills and equipment. Head online for persistent four-player drop-in/drop-out campaigns.

Explosive Experience United States Marine Corps tactics, weapons, and equipment serve as the core of *Red River's* combat. Firearms and vehicles can be modified and customized in exquisite detail and the ability to call in fire support has been expanded. We're already anticipating calling in air strikes from the promised A-10 ground attack aircraft.

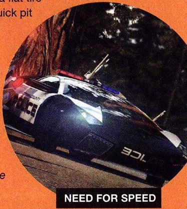
More War Gore One-bullet kills return in *Red River,* but field dressing is no longer a cure-all for wounds as treated injuries still affect combat performance. A documentary camera-style presentation ensures a disturbingly authentic war experience that includes the unbridled carnage of limbs being blown off and graphic head wounds.

GRAN TURISMO 5

9

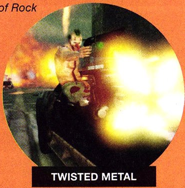
Readers' Most Wanted

Apparently our car-lust knows no bounds: Long-awaited racer *Gran Turismo 5* drives off with the top spot for the second month in row, and relatively recent entry *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit* jumps straight to the middle of the pack. The only noticeable absentee? *Twisted Metal*, which appeared at number 11 last month but has since dropped out of the Top 20 despite finally receiving official confirmation. Is this a flat tire for the franchise or just a quick pit stop on the road to glory?



NEED FOR SPEED

1. *Gran Turismo 5*
2. *Call of Duty: Black Ops*
3. *LittleBigPlanet 2*
4. *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*
5. *Madden NFL 11*
6. *Killzone 3*
7. *Final Fantasy XIV Online*
8. *Medal of Honor*
9. *Rock Band 3* (tie)
10. *SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs* (tie)
11. *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit*
12. *Fallout: New Vegas*
13. *The Sims 3*
14. *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II*
15. *Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds*
16. *Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock*
17. *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm 2*
18. *Dead Space 2*
19. *Red Dead Redemption: Liars and Cheats* [DLC]
20. *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*



TWISTED METAL

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of OTX Research. All games are PS3 titles scheduled to release after August 1. Polling period was July 11, 2010, to July 24, 2010.

Here's how to get ahead in business.

10 Is digital distribution a complete rip-off?

No box, fine. But no discount? What gives?

YES

Says the digitally disillusioned

Roger Burchill

Remember *The Jetsons?* Remember its vision of the future where we'd all be flying around in rocket cars? Well, it's the freakin' 21st century—*astronauts went to the moon a half-century ago*—and my earthbound butt is still stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic on a daily basis.

Digital distribution is the rocket car of gaming. It's a utopian future vision that's been propagated since before Snake started using Grecian Formula and *Sonic* games sucked. The games of the future were going to be delivered directly to our consoles with a grand light-speed parade down the information superhighway. No muss, no fuss, no more waiting for our gaming fix. And since there'd be no packaging, publishers could pass savings on to the consumer. Games would actually be cheaper…

But we should have known all along: The cake is a lie. The reality is that digital distribution is all about less. Sure, there's less waiting for your interactive entertainment, but no physical disc means no true backup copy to secure your gaming investment and no opportunity to resell to recoup on the investment. And since there's no difference in MSRP between digital and boxed games, that ultimately means less money in gamers' pockets.

Don't even get me started on the potential for Digital Rights Management issues and expiration dates for purchased content. Remember, the best way for gamers to protect themselves from the Man's greed is with a real game in their *hands,* not in some digital fantasyland.

NO

Says the virtual spendthrift

Gary Steinman

As the saying goes, you get what you pay for. But shouldn't that mean we pay less when we get less?

No, says I, and here's why: We are paying full price when we download the digital version of a retail game not just for the privilege of getting what we want when we want it. (The digital store is always open!) And not just for the savings in time and, say, gas money for the long drive to the local game emporium. And not just because it's good for the environment, cutting down on the carbon footprint of our favorite pastime. (All those boxes and all that shipping ain't good for Mother Earth.)

We're paying full price because that's what a game is worth.

Here's the dirty little secret about digital distribution: It's not so much that publishers are artificially maintaining a pumped-up price, then pocketing the difference. It's that the brick-and-mortar retailers, which still represent the vast majority of sales, insist on pricing parity. In other words, they will ship back a publisher's product if said publisher starts undercutting the price via other channels. So oftentimes publishers don't even have a choice in the matter.

But that, frankly, is a side note. After all, aside from the handful of breakout games and blockbuster franchises dominating the sales charts, most titles struggle to make real money, so if a few extra dollars make their way into publishers' coffers, why should I care? Not to sound like a hippie, but I'm cool seeing creators get paid for what they do.

Want that

Lust-haves for PlayStation people

ThinkFlood RedEye mini

It may not look like much, but the RedEye mini is capable of big things: namely, controlling the home theater components occupying our living rooms. The little dongle plugs into an iPhone (or iPad) to turn it into a universal remote, enabling control over any home entertainment component that responds via infrared. We can now turn on and off all our devices and flip through our cable channels and DVR with a single button press.

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SONY

Cyber-shot DSC-TX9 →

Sony's newest Cyber-shot camera incorporates the company's latest Exmor RCMOS sensor, a 3.5" touch screen LCD, and a 25–100mm equivalent lens. But most notable is its ability to shoot 3D photos by rapidly capturing two frames when the shutter button is pressed, which are viewable on any 3D-capable television. Cool features include a background defocus mode, 3D sweep panorama mode, and 1080i video recording.

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www.sonystyle.com

AiAiAi TMA-1

Crafted specifically for DJs and music producers, these headphones are so beautiful we almost hate to put them our greasy heads. Named after the Tycho Magnetic Anomaly-1 in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the TMA-1 is coated in durable nylon and comes with three optional—leather, semi-leather, or foam—cushions.

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www.aiaiai.dk

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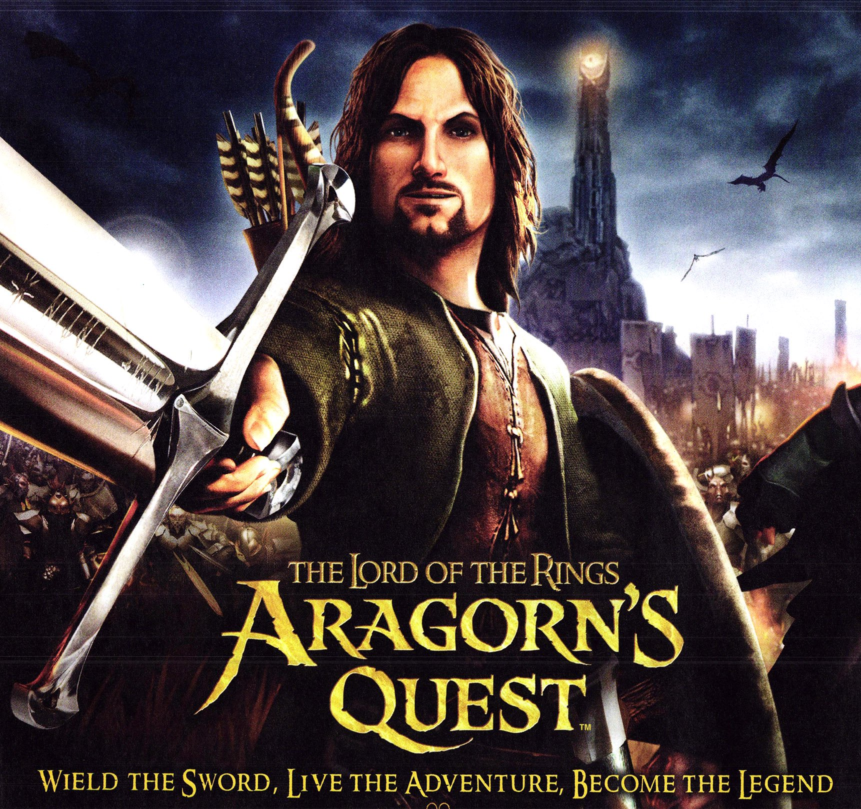
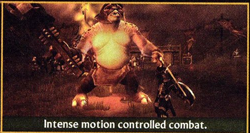
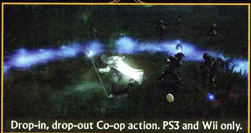
www.belkin.com

Prices and availability of products are correct as of press time.

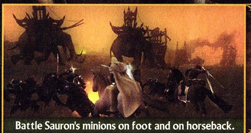

THE LORD OF THE RINGS
ARAGORN'S
QUEST™
WIELD THE SWORD, LIVE THE ADVENTURE, BECOME THE LEGEND



Intense motion controlled combat.



Drop-in, drop-out Co-op action. PS3 and Wii only.



Battle Sauron's minions on foot and on horseback.

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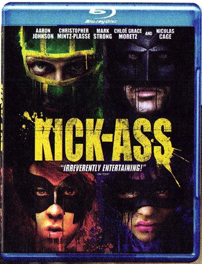
Blu-ray Central


Blu-ray Disc
AARON JOHNSON
CHRISTOPHER MINTZ-PLASSE
MARK STRONG
CHLOË GRACE MORETZ
AND NICOLAS CAGE
KICK-ASS
"IRREVERENTLY ENTERTAINING!"
USA TODAY

Kick-Ass

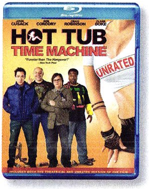
PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R

+ It's hard to believe Mark Millar's ultra-violent *Kick-Ass* made it to the theater, since it's full of gratuitous violence and profanity perpetrated by middle schoolers in costumes. However it happened, comic fans should be lining up for this one. Far truer to the source material than Millar's *Wanted*, *Kick-Ass* is a vivid, harsh, and utterly entertaining trip through a very R-rated live-action comic book. The great direction and cinematography manage a perfect balance of blood-soaked carnage and comic book heroism. The movie never loses track of its pacing or fun.

The actors are all in tune as well—even Nicolas Cage is great as Big Daddy, an ultra-violent Batman with no boring moral quandaries over killing. Chloë Moretz as Hit-Girl deserves special mention for pulling the most impressive acting turn for a child actor since Natalie Portman in *The Professional*. And Chloë, please accept our condolences for the creepy and disturbing mail you'll receive from pathetic fanboys.

On the extras side, there's engaging director's commentary and a full-screen documentary that plays with the movie in a window, along with a variety of other goodies about the comic and the production.

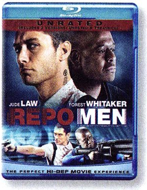
From the film to features, this Blu-ray lives up to its billing.


Blu-ray Disc
JOHN CUSACK
ROB CORDDRY
CRAIG ROBINSON
CLARK DUKE
HOT TUB TIME MACHINE
"Funnier than The Hangover!"
UNRATED

Hot Tub Time Machine

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R

+ Straight up: *Hot Tub Time Machine* is the funniest, bawdiest comedy you'll see this year. It's like a completely wrong, yet so-right take on *Back to the Future*. The premise of five guys' surprise trip back to the '80s in a hot tub is full of suspect logic and an insanely annoying Rob Corddry, but the jokes never stop or back down and the movie contains one of best (and cruelest) guy jokes ever filmed. On the downside, the extras are light, and a special edition seems inevitable.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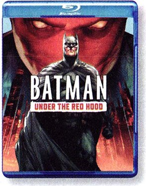
Repo Men

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** R

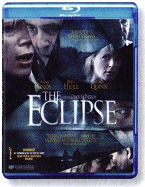
+ Putting aside the obvious debt it owes *Repo: The Genetic Opera*, *Repo Men* is solidly done sci-fi for a cyperpunk world. The action sequences are terrifically violent and Jude Law manages badass with style. The problem is the movie hinges largely on the audience giving a damn about a guy who was completely unlikeable and amoral until the tables were turned and he's forced to fight—which seems less like heroism and more like ironic justice. Beyond that, the ending is simply going to polarize viewers. Commentary, a picture-in-picture viewing mode, and other extras round out the disc nicely.



Batman: Under the Red Hood

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** PG-13

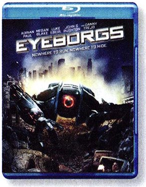
+ *Under the Red Hood* was a complex graphic novel to begin with, with a set up that began about 20 years ago. Yet, Warner Bros. has transitioned the story to video without losing its history or moral themes. It's a great movie that treats its subject matter seriously and earns a PG-13 rating with surprising amounts of on-screen violence. If there are any issues here, it's that John DiMaggio's portrayal of the Joker just never quite hits the mark. As usual, the disc is packed with extras—related cartoons, a *Jonah Hex* animated short, and plenty of other goodies—that make it a welcome addition to any animated superhero collection.



The Eclipse

PRICE: $29.98 **RATED:** R

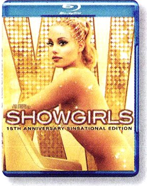
+ *The Eclipse* is an Irish movie, which instantly indicates two things: It won't be a particularly feel good experience and it's likely to be based in tragedy—both of which hold true. This isn't a horror movie, though there are (arguably) ghosts and spots of undeniably creepy tension. Instead, the movie is a drama about a widower with two kids (and the people who gravitate into his orbit) just trying to get through the days. If you don't mind the methodical pacing, *Eclipse* is actually both different and good.



Eyeborgs

PRICE: $29.98 **RATED:** UR

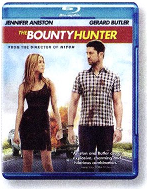
+ Suck on this, Michael Bay. *Eyeborgs* is a riotously smart, funny, and entertaining piece of indie sci-fi full of evil robots that blows *Transformers* out of the water. Excellent pacing, a surprisingly good script, great effects, and gory action more than compensate for the bits of questionable acting (and accents). The film deftly mixes sci-fi action, horror, and comedy with amazingly good execution. The extras are okay, if not plentiful, but this is a real gem for fans of the genre.



Showgirls

PRICE: $29.99 **RATED:** NC-17

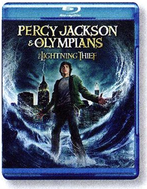
+ Fifteen years after *Showgirls'* theatrical release, it's easy to see why all the controversy and attention still lingers on. This is one of the only NC-17 films to reach any sort of mainstream consciousness—well-earned for its wall-to-wall nudity and sex and Elizabeth Berkley's desperate attempt to break free from the typecasting bondage of *Saved by the Bell.* Without a doubt, *Showgirls* is the modern *Plan 9 from Outer Space:* It fails on every level—the script and dialogue are mind-numbingly idiotic and the acting is terrible. But like *Plan 9,* it's a bizarrely watchable train wreck. Be sure to turn on the commentary, which makes it seem like an overactive version of *Mystery Science Theater 3000.*



The Bounty Hunter

PRICE: $38.96 **RATED:** PG-13

– Jennifer Aniston and Gerard Butler! What could go wrong, right? We appreciate Aniston, who just seems to be getting hotter with age, but even the most forgiving of viewers will have a hard time sitting through the stale jokes and clichés of this romantic comedy/actioner. There's not a shred of originality or effort in the execution. If a prospective partner, regardless of gender, likes this sludge, be sure to ditch him or her by the next morning.



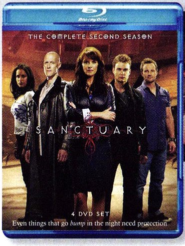
Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG

+ Percy Jackson is no Harry Potter, but frankly that's not such a bad thing. *The Lightning Thief* is unapologetically an action movie for tweeners, and on that level it's fine fare. There's little of the pacing and introspection of Potter here—the movie is almost entirely focused on snazzy visual effects and action. While there isn't much substance, it's certainly tolerable for adults. The extras are insubstantial as well, though the kiddies might enjoy the deleted scenes and making-of bits.

TV Time

Too busy to catch your favorite shows on their first run? Time to catch up.


THE COMPLETE SECOND SEASON
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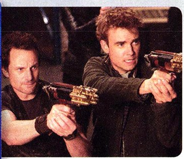
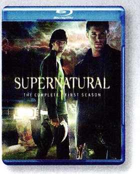
Even things that go bump in the night need protection



Sanctuary: Season 2

PRICE: $49.98 **RATED:** NR

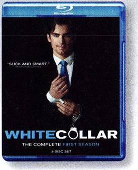
Making some major changes in focus and tone from its first season, *Sanctuary* still isn't a particularly good show. Yet, for lovers of schlocky sci-fi (er, SyFy?), there's something appealing about the show's cheesy effects, over-acting, and nonsensical plots.



Supernatural: Season 1

PRICE: $49.99 **RATED:** NR

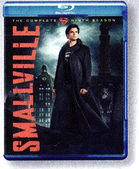
Fans of the CW show's crazy monster-killing antics will dig reliving the first season in high definition. Others can enjoy the otherworldly catch-up session.



White Collar: Season 1

PRICE: $69.99 **RATED:** NR

The USA Network has yet another clever and engaging winner in its lineup, and all that suave con artistry and crime fighting looks great on Blu-ray.



Smallville: Season 9

PRICE: $69.97 **RATED:** NR

Improbably still on the air, *Smallville* picks up the pace and finally begins to focus on transitioning Clark Kent into Superman. It's about damn time.

Questions, comments, rants, raves about our Blu-ray reviews? Email Jason D'Aprile at **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**

“A promise to cure

RATING PENDING to EVERYONE 10+ ™
RP-E 10+
Alcohol Reference
Comic Mischief
Lyrics
ESRB CONTENT RATING
May contain content inappropriate for children.
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boringness forever...”

–G4

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“It needs to be seen to be believed...”

– GamePro

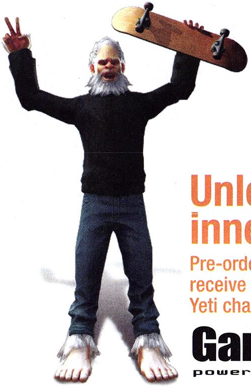
“Brings a new angle to the genre...”

– MTV

Nominated Best New Game of E3

– Kotaku

See the trailer @ www.shaunwhitegame.com



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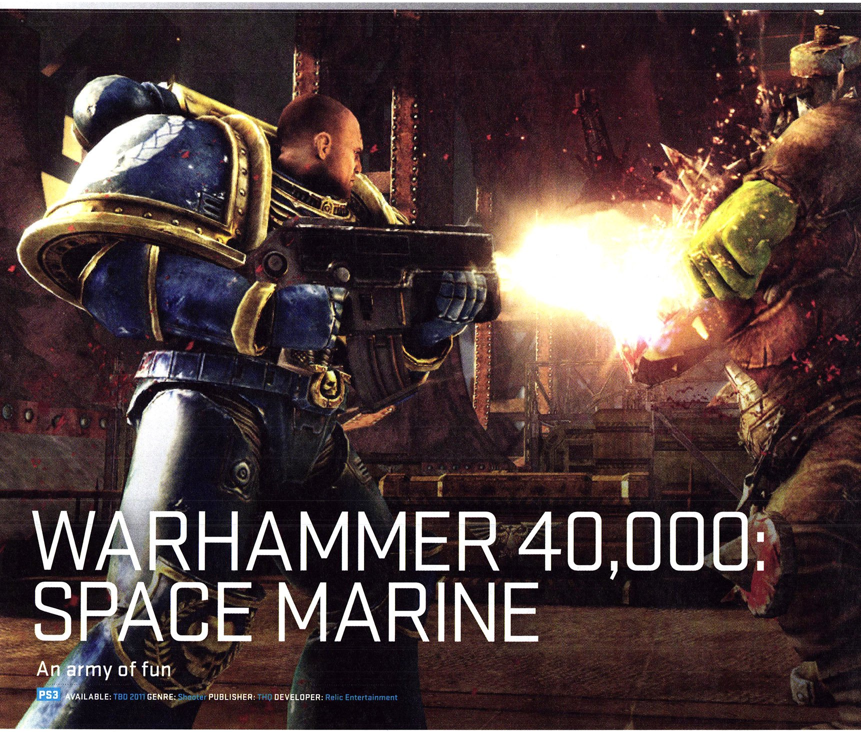


WARHAMMER 40,000: SPACE MARINE

An army of fun

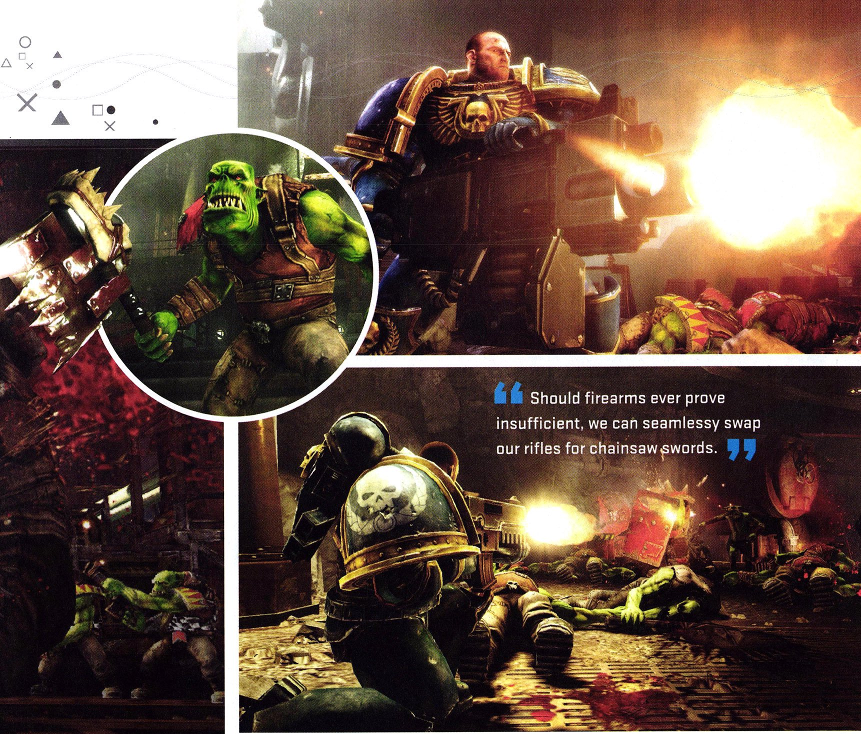
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** TBD 2011 **GENRE:** Shooter **PUBLISHER:** THQ **DEVELOPER:** Relic Entertainment

Ever wanted to rip the cannon off a tank and wield it like a rifle or tear through an enemy's torso with a chainsaw sword? We certainly have—some days it's all we can think about. But thanks to *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine,* we can finally stop dreaming and start sawing. This larger-than-life shooter from veteran PC developer Relic Entertainment promises to pack the punch of a summer action blockbuster into an accessible package while preserving the legacy of the *Warhammer* game franchise.

For those of us who weren't playing tabletop games in the mid-'80s, the *Warhammer 40K* universe is, in the words of the developers, "like ancient Rome in the distant future." Mankind has developed a serious taste for galactic imperialism, ruthlessly expanding throughout the solar system. But its reach eventually exceeds its grasp and the universe starts to push back, driving humanity not only back to Earth but also to the brink of extinction.

That's where the space marines come in. These men are the absolute pinnacle of contemporary combat and mankind's most reliable defense against all alien threats. They're disciplined, powerful, and relentless—distilled from centuries of warfare and religiously devoted to the Imperium of Man, the galactic empire governing all humanity. And the best of the best? It's an elite team of nigh-unstoppable warriors known (appropriately enough) as the ultra marines.

During *Marine's* main campaign, we will assume command as a captain in this crack squad and defend a planet-sized factory housing secret super weapons that could save our species…assuming they don't fall into the clutches of the invading orks. It sounds like our kind of party.



> Should firearms ever prove insufficient, we can seamlessy swap our rifles for chainsaw swords.

↖ **Bright colors and big explosions abound despite *Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine's* gritty world and gothic flourishes.**

Semper Fight

The team at Relic recently walked us through a handful of *Marine* missions to show off their super soldiers. The first mission opened with a massive air battle between a fleet of space marine drop ships and a swarm of bright green orks strapped to cartoonishly large rockets in what the developers promised would be one of many "high impact" set pieces.

We spent a few minutes picking off orks from the loading bay (and laughing as they spiraled comically into oblivion) before our ship decided it would rather be a crater than a plane. Naturally, we confidently leapt to safety at the last possible second because that's just how ultra marines roll.

Once on the ground, we were able to get a feel for *Marine's* gameplay: a back-to-basics approach to third-person, run-and-gun action focusing on building strong core mechanics. The marines' oversized suits of armor, for example, not only add a real sense of weight and impact to our movements but also allow us to absorb a substantial amount of damage, giving us an exhilarating sense of superhuman power. The grand gothic environments of the game's war-torn planet provide plenty of destructible cover, but with regenerating health and no hard cover system there's really no reason to hide.

Wave of Mutilation

The commitment to run-and-gun gameplay doesn't stop at cover, though. In traditional arcade fashion, the aiming reticule didn't expand as we lay on the trigger—which should allow us to maintain accuracy even while running headlong into wave after unrelenting wave of ork soldiers.

In addition to the 15 or so standard guns such as assault rifles and plasma guns—all of which feature persistent upgrades—we will also encounter "exotic" weapons that can only be used during unique scenarios. And should firearms ever prove insufficient, we can seamlessly swap our rifles for chainsaw swords and enjoy *Marine's* equally prominent melee combat system.

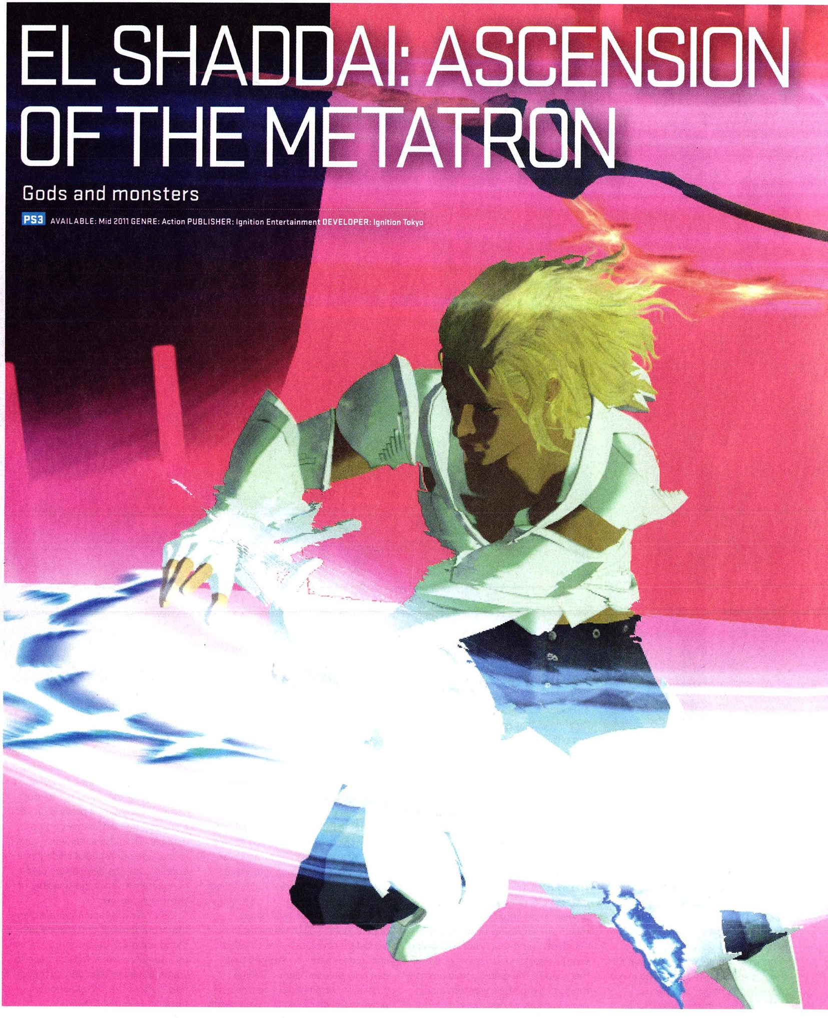
But more useful than any weapon (chainsaw sword or otherwise) are our fellow ultra marines. They won't tag along for the entire game, but certain missions will provide us with a supporting cast of one or more marines. Thankfully, we won't have to manage our artificial intelligence-buddies, but the developers didn't completely rule out the possibly of two-player co-op.

Either way, *Space Marine's* over-the-top approach and campy aesthetic are more than enough to keep us interested. Now we just have to wait and see if Relic can successfully perfect the classic shooter formula. | Scott Butterworth

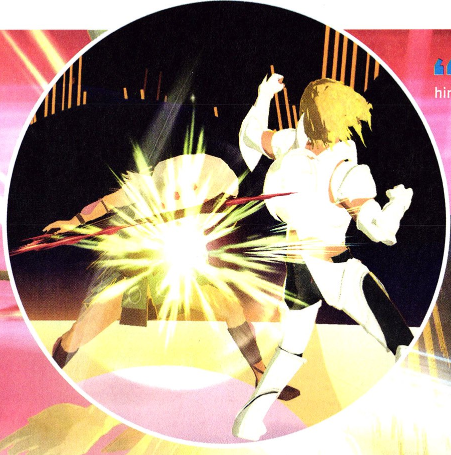
EL SHADDAI: ASCENSION OF THE METATRON

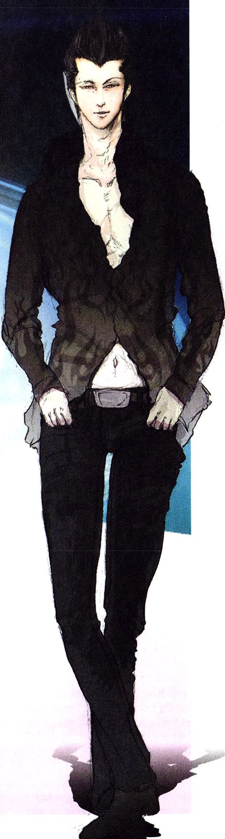
Gods and monsters

PS3 AVAILABLE: Mid 2011 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Ignition Entertainment DEVELOPER: Ignition Tokyo



> “Lucifel also has a cell phone giving him a direct line to God...”





Of the hundreds, if not thousands of games being released next year, we can't think of a single one more beautiful than Ignition Entertainment's *El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron.* Perhaps this shouldn't come as much of a surprise, given its superb pedigree: The game is the first to be directed by Sawaki Takeyasu, one of the founders and art director of Capcom's short-lived but hyper-talented Clover Studios. During his extended time at Capcom, Takeyasu created art and character designs for *Devil May Cry, Okami,* and *Viewtiful Joe,* and cites them all as influences here.

Metatron is essentially a videogame interpretation of the Book of Enoch—a piece of scripture not included in the Old Testament because it claimed that a human ascended to become the angel known as Metatron. In the game, we play as Enoch himself, who is called to heaven in order to help God round up seven fallen angels, a step necessary to prevent a flood that would wipe out mankind. During Enoch's journey, he receives the aid of four archangels: Raphael, Uriel, Gabriel, and Michael—shown in the game, thus far, as giant hands returning Enoch to the human world.

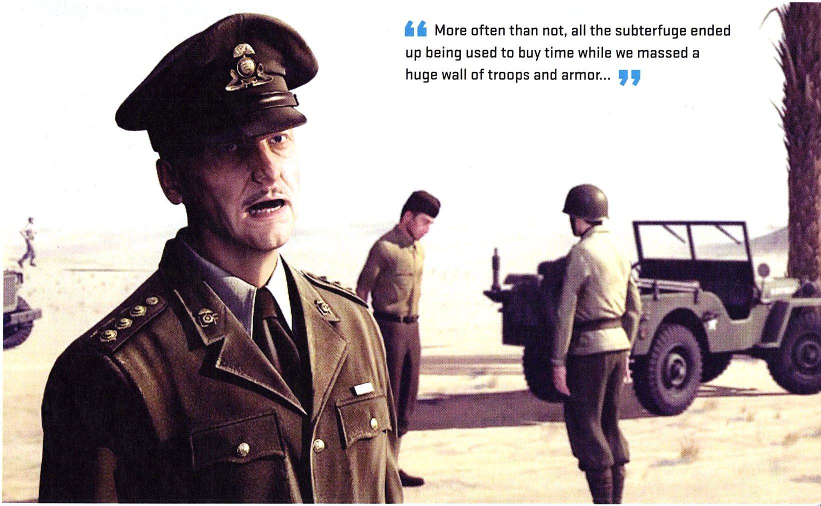
There's another interesting relationship at play as well: In *Metatron,* Lucifel is God's favorite angel, in part because he doesn't betray God as some of the archangels have. He's constantly giving Enoch advice, and offers him words of encouragement at save points. Lucifel also has a cell phone giving him a direct line to God, and he's gifted Enoch with the expensive designer jeans the hero wears beneath his armor. Lucifel acquires such items by traveling through time; he's a big fan of our modern era apparently, and is constantly bringing things back from our period.

A Gun and a Prayer

Tellingly, *Metatron* uses no health bar and, in fact, no heads-up display whatsoever; vitality is represented through the relative state of Enoch's armor, as well as that of his enemies. Quite opposed to the case in most action games, Enoch can only carry a single weapon at a time, which he must wrest, knock, or carefully pick from the hands of his enemies, and which will visually transform once taken. These weapons include several swords, various projectile weapons, defense-centric gauntlets, and the hyper-stylized arch, a physical manifestation of a shard of God's wisdom. Particularly powerful foes will bring about a role-playing game-style screen transition, whereby more complex techniques will be required from the player. It has been rumored with *Devil May Cry* as a primary influence, guns may play a role as well. Ultimately, though, the developer is focused on creating a combat system that's accessible: one attack button, one jump button, and one defend button do all the work, with finesse infused from rhythmic button-pressing. And while there's no inventory or equipment in the game, Enoch changes and gains abilities throughout his journey.

But combat doesn't tell the whole story of *Shaddai;* platforming and visual puzzles will be significant parts of the experience as Enoch traverses the otherworldly environs. One section of the game, for instance, sees Enoch navigating across a series of hovering stones peeking through the clouds—in the style of a side-scrolling shooter.

Metatron is a gorgeous piece of work, as reminiscent of carefully crafted Japanese animation as it is of any videogame in recent memory. If the experience can live up to the visual promise, it could also very well become Ignition's breakout title. | Evan Shamoon



> “More often than not, all the subterfuge ended up being used to buy time while we massed a huge wall of troops and armor...”

R.U.S.E.

Master the art of misdirection

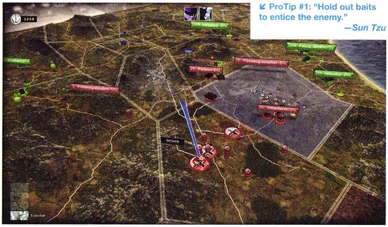
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** September **GENRE:** Real-Time Strategy **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** Eugen Systems

On the battlefields of World War II, few things were more important than knowing where the enemy was going to strike, and how. Or at least, that's the lesson *R.U.S.E.* is trying to impart to us as an Italian fascist militia surrounds and prepares to destroy us. Where once we were meant to hold down the fort while an Allied invasion force landed, we now find ourselves cut off from the main battle by an enemy who got hold of our plans through a spy. If we're going to punch out of the pocket they've trapped us in and snatch back victory, it's going to take some careful planning—and more than a little trickery.

More Than Just a Title

With instantly deployable units and buildings, semi-intelligent troops that flee when damaged, and enormous battlefields that can be zoomed in for a close view of the action or zoomed out until they become a general's-eye tactical map (complete with a table and a surrounding room), *R.U.S.E.* isn't quite like any other real-time strategy game we've played. What really sets it apart, however, are its “ruses,” strategic commands that—when applied to a given sector of the map—can reveal an enemy's troop strength and movements, hide our own units from enemy sight, or even deploy decoys to divert attention away from the real offensive.

When playing through the single-player campaign (as Gen. Joe Sheridan, a resourceful officer who's continually pitted against tough odds, thanks to the efforts of a spy known only as “Prometheus”), ruses turned out to be absolutely essential, particularly when our troop strength was low. As we fought across battlefields in North Africa, Italy, and France, we frequently had to turn to the Radio Silence ruse (for example) to keep our movements hidden—and more importantly, to keep German and Italian tank patrols from smashing us while we amassed an attack. Deploying spies gave us a clear picture of what units were occupying all the ominous enemy markers moving around the field, and by decrypting their radio transmissions, we could see exactly where they were planning to attack.

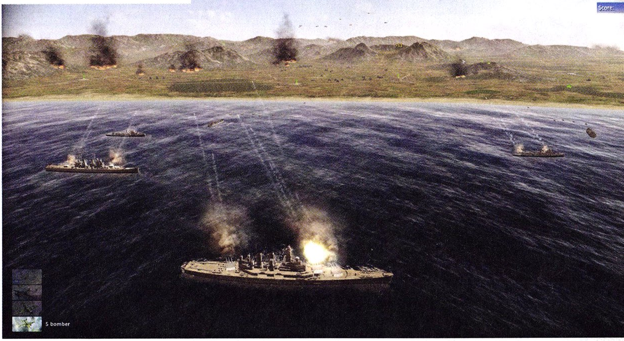


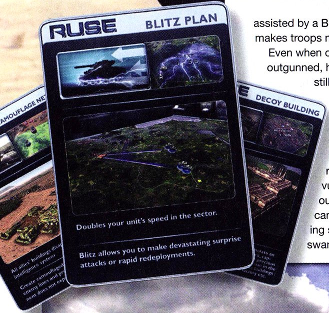
ProTip #1: “Hold out baits to entice the enemy.” —*Sun Tzu*

Build and Destroy

Of course, all that is useless without troops to back it up. While we began the game with infantry, light tanks, and anti-tank guns (which are delicate but have incredible range and firepower), we soon graduated to bomber planes, tank-destroying artillery vehicles, and even prototype vehicles like flamethrower tanks and mobile anti-aircraft cannons. More often than not, all the subterfuge ended up being used to buy time while we massed a huge wall of troops and armor to simply roll over whatever defenses the enemy had (maybe

↘ ProTip #2: "In war, then, let your great object be victory, not lengthy campaigns." —*Sun Tzu*




RUSE
BLITZ PLAN
Doubles your unit's speed in the sector.
Blitz allows you to make devastating surprise attacks or rapid redeployments.
CAMOUFLAGE NE
DECOY BUILDING

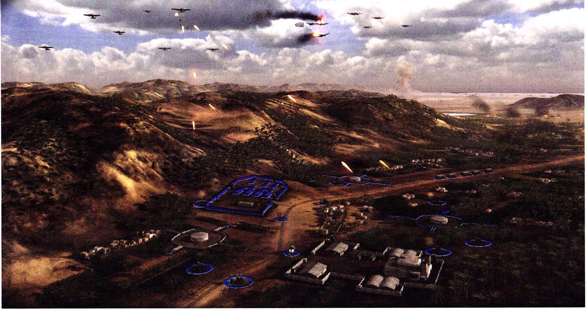
assisted by a Blitz ruse, which makes troops move twice as fast).

Even when outnumbered and outgunned, however, our troops still had a few tricks up their sleeves—ruses notwithstanding.

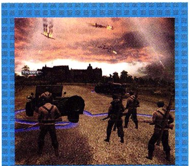
Foot soldiers, for instance, are relatively weak and vulnerable if caught out in the open, but can take up hiding spots in forests, swamps, and towns to create impassable, bazooka-manned ambush points.

Placement can be extremely important for units that can't hide, as obstructions like hills and buildings not only block movement but line of sight as well. So to defend a village square, for example, we would need to make sure our tanks or gun emplacements are placed in such a way as to give them a complete view of the two or three roads leading into town. Beyond the first few missions, these considerations don't come into play that often, since much of the action takes place in open battlefields, but they're an interesting touch nonetheless.

Outside of its campaign, *R.U.S.E.* features a slew of multiplayer and side-missions, including its operation mode, which pits players against objective-based missions as different factions (either alone or in co-op with up to three others). Factor in the huge variety of units and missions that can last hours, and *R.U.S.E.* looks to have a lot to offer strategy fans—the more devious, the better. | Mikel Reparaz

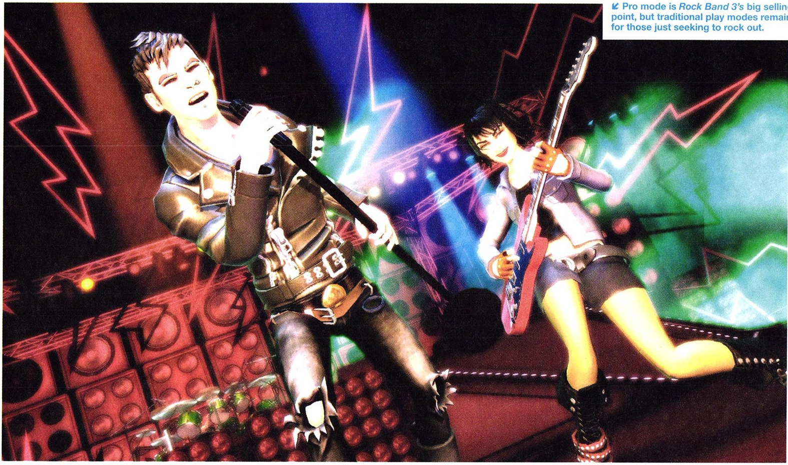


↙ Death from above is a smart way to soften up a foe.



↑ The Better Part of Valor

Should they ever be caught out or nearly killed by more powerful units, troops in *R.U.S.E.* will attempt to flee—something that's extremely useful for healing damaged units or avoiding suicidal confrontations. However, it was extremely frustrating whenever we expected a line of infantry to hold their positions against advancing tanks (alongside *other* tanks, of course), only to check back later and find out that they'd fled en masse before the enemy even started firing—often straight into the line of fire of a second enemy tank division coming from the other direction.



Pro mode is *Rock Band 3's* big sellin point, but traditional play modes remai for those just seeking to rock out.

ROCK BAND 3

Don't fear the teacher

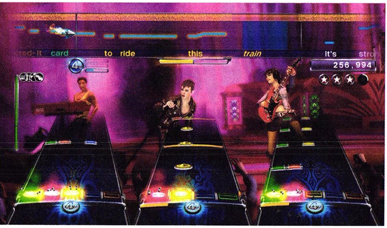
PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Rhythm/Music PUBLISHER: MTV Games/EA DEVELOPER: Harmonix

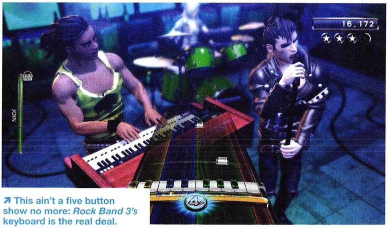
Training modes, traditionally, are boring as hell. The team at Harmonix knows this. But it also knows only a select few currently posses the musical ability to tackle *Rock Band 3's* hyper-realistic new Pro mode—which challenges gamers to play note-for-note recreations of real songs—and the rest of us are going to need a little assistance. That's why *Band 3* features a massive collection of music tutorials that, according to the developers, will not only be fun but could potentially turn us into real live musicians.

When we met with Harmonix recently, we decided to rise to Pro mode's challenge and tackle *Rock Band's* latest instrument: keyboards. Of course, we've never played a piano in our lives, so this meant we'd have to rely on the trainers. The very first lessons start one note at a time, but the fun original music and simple ambient goals (which extend to every aspect of the game and reward players with in-game rewards) provided both an incentive to continue and a distraction from the fact we were actually learning music.

It also helped that the trainers aren't aggressively educational. Most of the time, the game simply required us to match the notes on screen. Only when we stopped to check out the various corners of the screen did we realize we were learning chromatic scales and the location of "middle C." Basically, the tutorials were only as educational as we wanted them to be. The rest of the time, we were just playing *Rock Band.*

The team was quick to remind us the tutorials and even Pro mode itself are completely optional. *Band 3* still offers the same old five colored lanes, so fans of the traditional gameplay can simply plug in and start enjoying all the other new features, such as the three-part vocal harmonies and convenient drop-in/drop-out multiplayer options. But part of the fun comes from the challenge, so we were happy to embark on a journey of musical self-improvement. And now we can play Devo's "Whip It" in real life. Well, part of it anyway. | Scott Butterworth





This ain't a five button show no more: *Rock Band 3's* keyboard is the real deal.

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PlayStation 3

PlayStation Network

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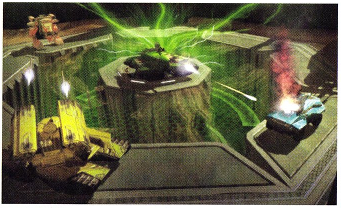


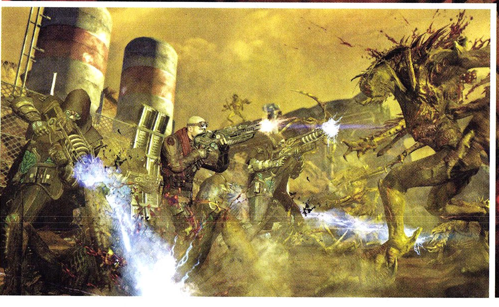
← **Faction Feud**

In the downloadable game *Battlegrounds*, players can vie for supremacy using Red Faction vehicles.

RED FACTION: ARMAGEDDON

Destruction goes underground

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** March 2011 **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** THQ **DEVELOPER:** Volition



> Gone is *Guerrilla's* moral conundrum in which we had to contain our destructive rage...

Sometimes, destruction is not enough. That's the lesson learned by Volition, the team behind the *Red Faction* franchise. The series carved out a niche for itself by letting us destroy just about anything in the environment—and with *Red Faction: Guerrilla,* destruction became a goal in itself. In that game we played as Alec Mason and, as a part of the Red Faction resistance, it was our job to bring down buildings, bridges, power stations, vehicles, *whatever,* using everything from a basic hammer to rocket launchers to armored tanks.

Two generations later and we're back on Mars, this time playing as Alec's grandson Darius. The colonists no longer live on the surface, having been pushed underground in a violent war. But after a decade of sub-surface living, a new threat emerges, and from the most unlikely direction: below.

The colonists quickly find their homes engulfed by a malevolent infestation ("the plague"), which has an annoying tendency to glom onto manmade structures and consume them. In just three days, the plague has devastated large portions of these underground cities, and it's up to a Mason progeny to once again save us all.

Which brings us to the dark cave where our demo begins. Darius is leading a small convoy in search of survivors. As we push forward, we notice a large break into the world: the first sign of an infestation. "When you see this, it's bad news," lead level designer Jameson Durall says. "They've already come into an area, everybody is most likely already dead, and you really need to watch your back for what's to come."

Enter the creeper, a crab-like crawler that looks exactly like its name. Durall tells us they're usually the first on the scene: they're quick and they attack in packs, but they're easily dispatched. Next, we tussle with some ravagers—bigger, beefier, and more agile, these foes are also smarter than creepers and use ceilings and walls to their advantage. Our demo ends as we step into a Red Faction Leo, a smaller version of the walker mechs from the previous game—perfect for bringing down the buildings all around us.

Everything Must Go

Yes, once again we're destroying everything, but this time it's different. Gone is *Guerrilla's* moral conundrum, in which we had to contain our destructive rage lest we take down buildings important to our fellow colonists. The plague fixes that; once an area is infested, *everything* must be brought down.

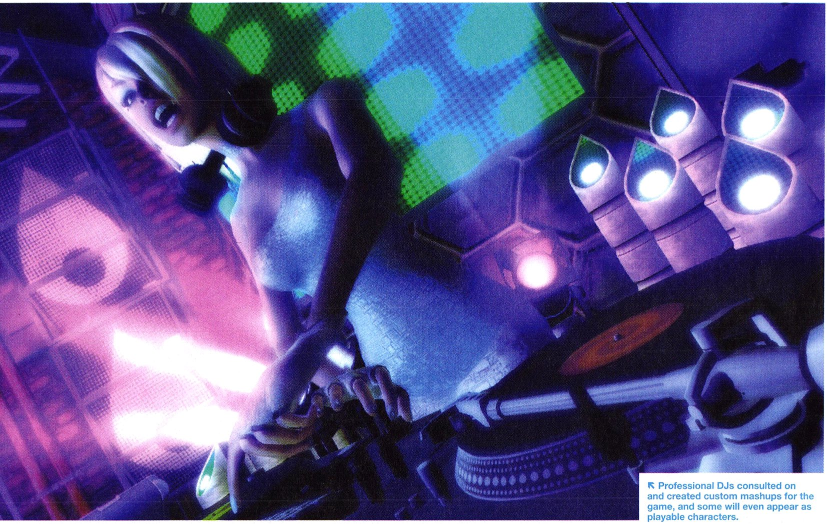
But that's not the only aspect that *Red Faction: Armageddon* aims to tighten up. In going underground, we now have 360 degrees of destruction. And by offering up new weapons (like a magnet gun that can grab onto any item in the world), we also have more to play with. We can now, for example, send shrapnel raining down from the ceiling to stop a ravager, then grab something off a wall with the magnet gun to shoot at another ravager, then use the nanoforge to reconstruct something we destroyed to create more ammo for our magnet gun, and so on. "It's less about just bringing something down, and more about having fun with destroying things while having a purpose behind it," Durall says.

Armageddon also replaces the open-world setting of *Guerrilla* with story-driven linear levels—but Durall is quick to point out that these underground areas are like "mini-sandbox encounters." And Durall also tells us we'll still have the opportunity to head above ground for some more open (yet not fully open-world) levels.

Generation Gap

There's a lot to look forward to in *Armageddon,* but there's still a lot we don't know—like what actually happened between *Guerrilla* and the upcoming game. Enter *Red Faction: Origins,* a movie that bridges the generation gap, starring Alec Mason's son (and Darius' father) Jake. Debuting on Syfy network in March alongside the game, the two-hour live-action movie is also a pilot that, if all goes well, will kick off a full series, a la *Battlestar Galactica.*

Also in the works is a downloadable title called *Red Faction: Battlegrounds.* Although this top-down, twin-stick multiplayer shooter is "fiction-lite," it features legit vehicles from the *Red Faction* world and is positioned as a fun diversion to tide us over while we wait for the proper game to be released. We played a few rounds of a king-of-the-hill style shootout, and though it's not earth-shattering, it was amusing enough to keep us coming back for another session. That, along with the promise of additional content in *Armageddon* that can only be unlocked via *Battlegrounds,* will have us considering this download when it releases in February. | **Gary Steinman**



↖ Professional DJs consulted on and created custom mashups for the game, and some will even appear as playable characters.

DJ HERO 2

Scratching its way to the top

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Rhythm/Music PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: FreeStyleGames

Just like the inventive music culture inspiring the game, the original *DJ Hero* managed to move an entire genre in a cool and creative new direction. While most rhythm games simply fought for master tracks, *DJ Hero* offered clever mashups created specifically for the game by a world-class collection of DJs. And rather than following the five-button formula laid out by the rest of the pack, *Hero* opted for just three: green and blue lanes representing the two tracks featured in the mashup and a red lane down the middle for the samples layered on top.

So here's the good news: *DJ Hero 2* plays more like a remix than a brand-new track, traveling farther down the trail blazed by the first game. New mashups, modes, and gameplay mechanics join all the crossfading, sampling, and scratching of the first game for a fresh take on the original experience offering greater freedom and creativity across all aspects of the game.

Style Guide

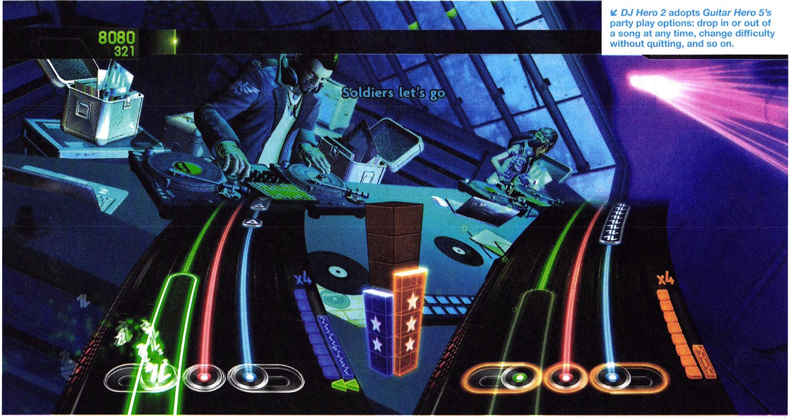
We encountered a handful of new mechanics during our hands-on session with the game, but the flashiest were the freestyle sections, which let us take creative control of the track for a brief period of time much like a drum fill in *Rock Band* or *Guitar Hero.*

Freestyling comes in three flavors: scratching, sampling, and crossfading (naturally). The idea is simple: When the blue or green lanes grow wider, that's our cue to start scratching freely. Similarly, when the red track grows wider, we can tap the sample button to create unique rhythms using sound bites isolated from the track being played. Freestyle crossfading, on the other hand, allows us to swap between the two songs in a mashup, eliminating one from the mix in order to let the other shine through for a big dramatic moment.

The whole mechanic felt like a completely natural extension of the existing beat-matching gameplay, adding not only some welcome variety but also an opportunity to get creative and become more deeply immersed in the music. Seriously, what could be cooler than actually hearing ourselves scratch over a professional mashup?

Freestyling also gave us a chance to rack up some serious points. The game registers our actions during freestyle sections and awards a

↖ Don't worry *DJ Hero* players; the game's controller isn't changing. There's no need to invest in a new turntable.



↙ *DJ Hero 2* adopts *Guitar Hero 5's* party play options: drop in or out of a song at any time, change difficulty without quitting, and so on.

bonus-based score on how rhythmic and recognizable the patterns were. This proved useful in our head-to-head multiplayer battles, where only the first player to hit the first note of the section gets a chance to freestyle and score big.

Mix and Match

Fortunately, straight head-to-head is no longer the only to way to compete with friends. *Hero 2's* expanded multiplayer options include several new modes, such as streaker—which gives us three chances to bank the highest note streak—and checkpoint—in which we compete to "win" the most discrete sections of the mashup.

But by far the most compelling new mode is DJ Battle, which, as the name suggests, emulates the back and forth, call and response nature of a real-life DJ showdown. In fact, developer FreeStyleGames created a handful of special mixes just for this mode, all of which feature gradually escalating difficulty and some seriously nasty beats. We got so absorbed by the action that we actually taunted our opponent from behind our plastic turntable while we grooved to the beat. It wasn't pretty, but it certainly was fun.

If we happened to be friendless, however, we could still enjoy DJ battles in the new, more formal career mode dubbed Empire Mode. As with the older *Hero* games, the career features a light "rise to fame" storyline letting us select and deck out a DJ and then play through a number of venues in various cities across the world. Beat songs, earn stars, and advance through the game—simple. Each venue opens with a "megamix" of several consecutive mashups and closes with a DJ battle against a famous mix artist like Z-Trip, DJ Shadow, or Deadmau5.

And here's the crazy thing: Even though we don't follow dance music and have basically no idea who those guys are, we're still excited to battle them come October. | Scott Butterworth

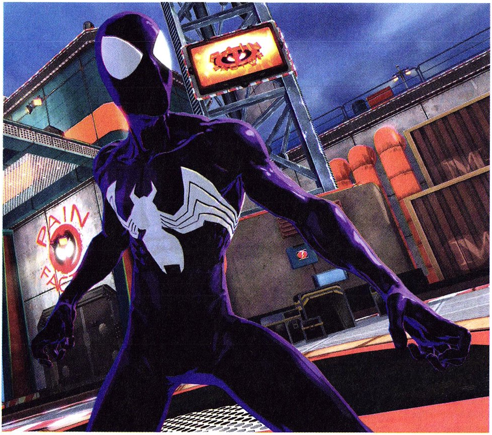
↓ Monster Mashups

Look for an even more diverse and modern collection of mashups in *DJ Hero 2*. Here's what FreeStyleGames has announced so far:

TUPAC "California Love" *mixed with* **B.O.B. ft. BRUNO MARS "Nothin' On You"**
KANYE WEST "Love Lockdown" *mixed with* **METALLICA "Day That Never Comes"**
DIZZEE RASCAL/ARMAND VAN HELDEN "Bonkers" *mixed with* **BASEMENT JAXX "Where's Your Head At"**
NAS "Hero" *mixed with* **TALIB KWELI "Get By"**
SNOW "Informer" *mixed with* **JACKSON 5 "ABC"**
JANET JACKSON "Nasty" *mixed with* **JUSTICE "D.A.N.C.E."**
DJ SHADOW "Midnight In A Perfect World" *(FreeStyleGames Remix)*
KELIS "Acapella" *(David Guetta Extended Remix) (FSG Remix)*
DAFT PUNK "Human After All" *(FSG Remix)*
EDWIN STARR "War" *mixed with* **JUSTICE "Waters of Nazareth"** *
LADY GAGA "Just Dance" *mixed with* **DEADMAU5 "Ghosts 'n' Stuff"**
PUSSYCAT DOLLS "Don't Cha" *mixed with* **PITBULL "I Know You Want Me"**
IYAZ "Replay" *mixed with* **RIHANNA "Rude Boy"**
NELLY "Hot in Herre" *mixed with* **WARREN G/NATE DOGG "Regulate"**
THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS "Galvanize" *mixed with* **"Leave Home"**
MSTRKRFT/N.O.R.E. "Bounce" *(FSG Remix)* *

*DJ Battle Mix

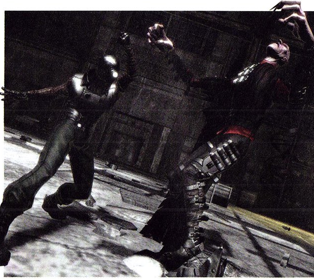
PlayStation Gallery

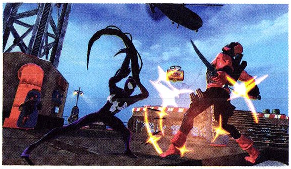


Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** September **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** Activision **DEVELOPER:** Beenox

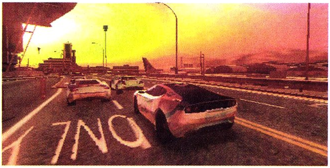
The ultimate web-slinger has been revealed! Ultimate Spider-Man, wearing a living black costume, will be pitted against the psychotic criminal Carnage who, in one of those weird comic book coincidences, is also toting a living costume. Carnage and Spidey engage in a big dukearoo inside a secret base, and our hero is able to use his costume to great effect, creating tendrils to strike enemies from a distance or using them to disarm foes. This all happens in a game that supposes a magical artifact has been shattered, and its four pieces are now in the hands of supervillains who must be defeated by various Spider-Men, including the previously announced classic Spidey, the futuristic Spider-Man 2099, and the gritty wall-crawler from *Spider-Man Noir*. | Shane Zachary





Split/Second

PSP **AVAILABLE:** Holiday **GENRE:** Driving **PUBLISHER:** Disney Interactive Studio **DEVELOPER:** Sumo Digital

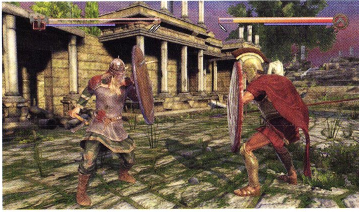


Simple controls with over-the-top action: perhaps a perfect formula for racing on the go. It's enough to have us excited about *Split/Second* on the PSP. The console version focused on acceleration and braking to control our vehicles (no need for a hand brake), both mapped to shoulder triggers, with just one other essential button to trigger the track-shattering power plays. If the PSP iteration can deliver the same thrills in a smaller format, we're sold. | Gary Steinman

NBA Elite 11

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** October **GENRE:**Sports **PUBLISHER:** EA Sports **DEVELOPER:** EA Canada

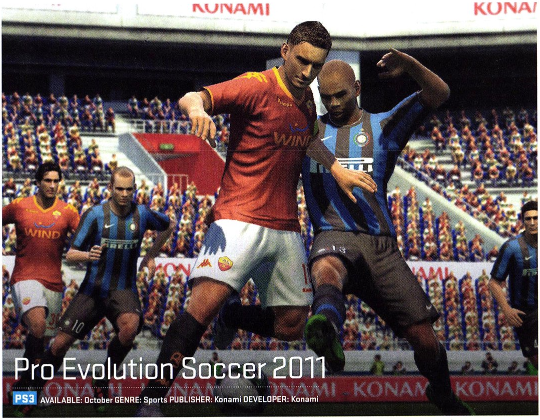
Sporting a new franchise tag and a renewed emphasis on game mechanics, *NBA Elite 11* aims to reestablish EA's position in the hoops paint. Our first hands-on touch revealed that the new dual stick-centric control system exhibits a smooth, natural sense of flow, timing, and touch when shooting and ball-handling. The defensive emphasis is on timing and positioning, where new physics and blended-motion systems make for more realistic ball reactions and deflections during block and steal attempts. The basketball genre has been a bit stagnant of late, but *Elite* has us eager to start the new season. | Roger Burchill



Deadliest Warrior: The Game

PSN **AVAILABLE:** Fall **GENRE:** Fighting **PUBLISHER:** Spike Games
DEVELOPER: Pipeworks Software

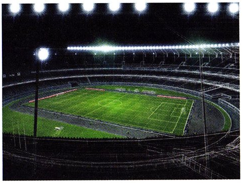
Spike TV's *Deadliest Warrior* brings every kid's school-ground arguments to gruesome reality: the cunning ninja versus the scurvy pirate, the powerful Spartan versus the stoic samurai—if it involves sharp objects and can be infused with faux-scientific knowledge, it can be recreated. However, if watching a grown man go nuts on a pig carcass with a pair of katars just isn't cutting it anymore, the downloadable *Deadliest Warrior: The Game* is aiming to satiate players' bloodlust for hypothetical carnage. *Warrior* features eight of history's most iconic battlers and their native battlegrounds for bloody weapon-based one-on-one combat. | David Murphy

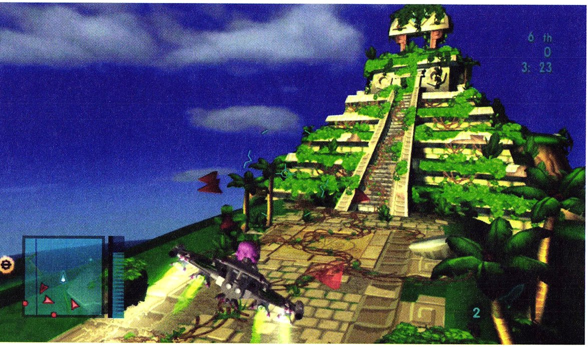


Pro Evolution Soccer 2011

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** October **GENRE:** Sports **PUBLISHER:** Konami **DEVELOPER:** Konami

Don't come down from that World Cup adrenaline-high just yet. Although the Cup has been won, many pitch battles lie ahead in the latest iteration of *Pro Evolution Soccer. PES 2011* sports more than a thousand new character animations, enhanced pass control, a new power gauge system, and an expanded set of tactical maneuvers that promise the series' most realistic and free-flowing soccer sim experience to date. The Become a Legend mode, where the player assumes the role of an up-and-coming soccer prodigy, has been reworked for a grander experience, and a Stadium Edit mode has been developed to allow fans to create their own home stadium. | DM

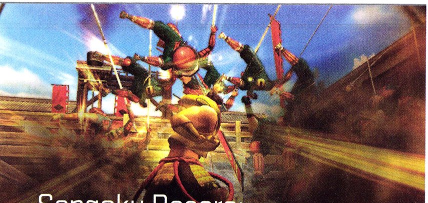




MySims: SkyHeroes

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** September **GENRE:** Flight **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** The Sims Studio

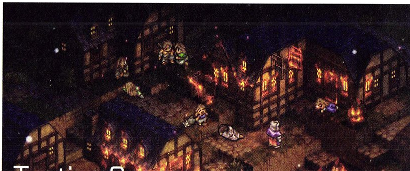
Morcubus, leading villain of the *MySims* series, has stretched his treacherous claws to the sky, and it's up to a band of spunky rebels and an ace pilot with amnesia to stop him. *MySims: Sky Heroes* is aiming to be a lighthearted aerial combat game with splitscreen co-op, free-for-all online dogfights, and a 42-mission single-player campaign. Design a custom character and take to the skies to earn customizable parts and plane boosting perks. Although *Heroes* has a kid-friendly look, its unique concept has the potential to appeal to older, more sophisticated gamers. | David Murphy



Sengoku Basara: Samurai Heroes

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** October **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** Capcom **DEVELOPER:** Capcom

Charge into battle, cut through a squintillion bad guys, then fly away on the back of a stoic cyborg battle-buddy—such is the life of a warrior in *Sengoku Basara: Samurai Heroes,* the latest in a long line of hack-and-slash action games inspired by the popular anime series. The Japanese-style action gameplay involves battling through crowds, executing combos to defeat hundreds of enemies, facing off against a tough boss, then collecting the spoils. *Basara* looks as if it'll provide some straightforward pick-up-and-jam fun, but runs the risk of being a too familiar experience. | DM



Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together

PSP **AVAILABLE:** TBD **GENRE:** Strategy **PUBLISHER:** Square Enix **DEVELOPER:** ArtDink

Nearly everyone knows about *Final Fantasy Tactics,* the game that brought the tactics genre to gamers across North America. However, hardly anyone knows about *Tactics Ogre,* the tactics game that essentially created and defined the tactics genre. Well, lucky for gamers around the globe who didn't have the opportunity to play this acclaimed 16-bit title, members of the original development team have assembled to work on the PSP remake. The game will get a raft of refinements, including changes to the battle system and upgrades to its visuals, all of which are under the personal direction of the game's original designer, Yasumi Matsuno. | DM

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Starkiller strikes back

PS3 | **Available:** October | **Publisher:** LucasArts | **Developer:** LucasArts

In *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II,* LucasArts sends in the clones. Again.

BY GREG ORLANDO

Back from the dead, the Jedi Starkiller thinks he's a clone now. But is he really a genetic copy? Or is the evil Lord Vader up to his old tricks?

Time will tell. LucasArts has once again unleashed the Force, and we've got the world-exclusive first playtest.

This will be pretty. Pretty damn destructive, that is.

It's raining on Kamino. It's always raining on Kamino, the birthplace, so to speak, of the grand Army of the Republic. It's here the bounty hunter Jango Fett donated his cells and gave birth to everyone's least favorite security force, the clone army that eventually became the stormtroopers. It's also here the villainous Darth Vader has come to a special cloning facility.

Vader has a secret. And it's this secret on which *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II* hinges.

Starkiller, aka the secret apprentice, died at the end of *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed,* and while LucasArts debated starting the sequel with a brand-new character, it was ultimately impossible to keep this good Jedi down. The game begins with Starkiller back from the dead, and seemingly cloned. Vader wants his former secret apprentice to continue his mission from the first game: hunting down and eliminating the last of the Jedi.

Back from the grave and fresh from the cloning tube, Starkiller is told to begin his journey with some wholesale slaughter. Initially, Vader tasks him with killing rebel troopers, but he refuses. He's haunted by visions of a past life; of the love of Juno Eclipse, a former pilot for the Empire; and of the betrayal of one very mean man in black. Instead of becoming a puppet, Starkiller opts to flex his humanity. He lashes out at his master, and sets off on a grand adventure.

"We're very honest about this being a more personal story," the game's executive producer Haden Blackman says. Gameplay-wise LucasArts wants us to embrace the notion of unrestrained power—the power to crush TIE fighters, fry enemies with lightning, and generally act in the manner of a homicidal steamroller—but in the slow moments (and there will be some), the game will tackle the notion of what it means to be human.

As Starkiller quests to find out what happened to Eclipse, he'll travel to far-flung places across the galaxy, meeting up with some classic characters from the *Star Wars* films. On Dagobah, the enigmatic imp Yoda awaits.

"Only a watcher am I now," Yoda says wistfully. "Brought you here the galaxy has. Your path, clearly, this is." When Starkiller asks about why he's here, Yoda points him to the cave of evil, last seen in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back,* and answers: "Something lost, a part of yourself, perhaps. That which you seek, inside, you will find."

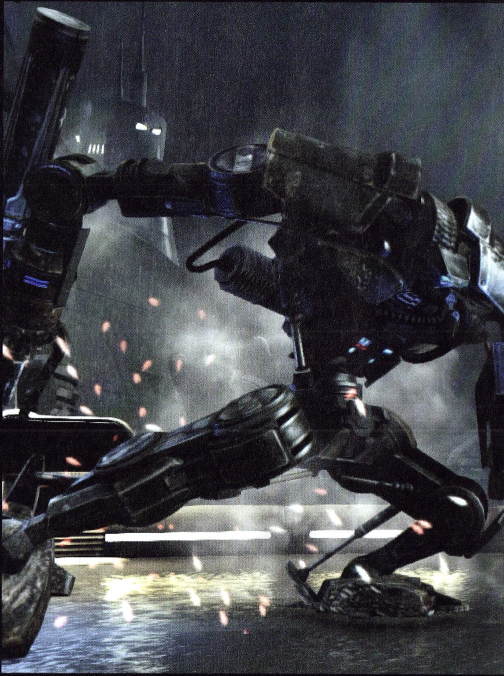
As part of Vader's grand Starkiller reclamation act, bounty hunter Boba Fett will be enlisted to capture Juno Eclipse. Sadly, Starkiller won't get to interact, or fight with, either Fett or Yoda; LucasArts seems reluctant to reveal the extent of their involvement in the game. "Yoda does have a small role," says Cameron Suey, the game's assistant production manager. "Boba Fett has a small but very integral role. They're definitely more than cameos."

"They really help propel the story," executive producer Julio Torres says, "and potentially tie interesting stuff together."

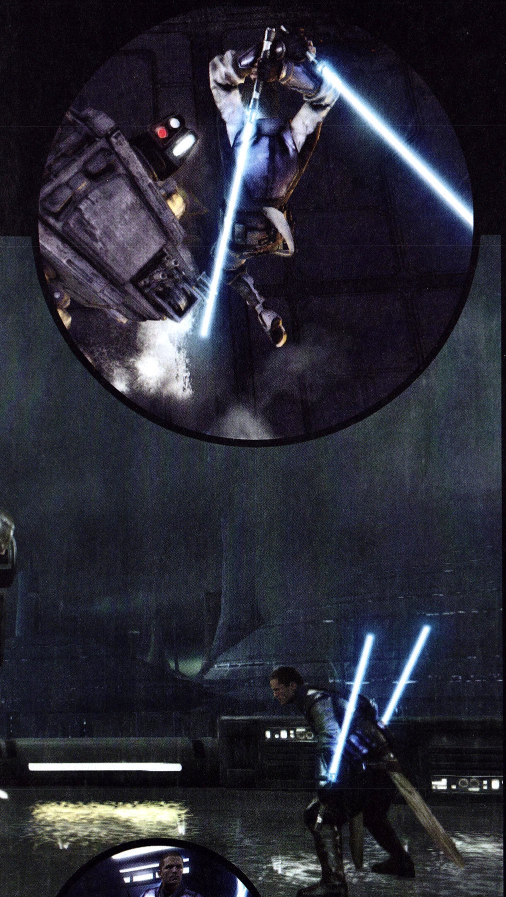
Interesting stuff looms large—large enough to crush a Jedi, certainly—in *Unleashed 2.* The game also takes Starkiller to the gambling world of Cato Neimoidia for a fight against a huge, tusked and fanged, goo-spitting beast known as the gorog.

"You think the rancor is big? This guy is bigger," says Brett Rector, assistant production manager for *Unleashed 2.*

Oh, and someone's personal spaceship will be hijacked. This person, in particular, will not be pleased.



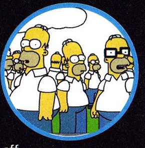
As Starkiller quests to find out what happened to Juno, he'll travel to far-flung places across the galaxy, meeting up with some classic characters from the *Star Wars* films.



↑ When Starkiller's Force powers are maxed out in rage mode, he'll be able to crush huge enemies and take control of multiple foes with his mind trick.

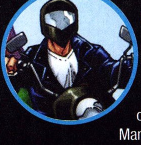
SEND IN THE CLONES

Starkiller may be fighting the villainous empire on his own, but he'll come to know a great secret: With a clone, you're never alone. Here's a look at four famous clones.



HOMER SIMPSON

LAST SEEN: **The Simpsons *Treehouse of Horror XIII***
CLONE OF: **Homer Simpson**
An evil hammock creates an army of Homer Simpsons, and the only way to save Springfield is to lure the clones off a cliff with a giant donut.

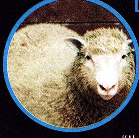


BEN REILLY

LAST SEEN: **Under six feet of dirt**
CLONE OF: **Peter Parker**
Ben Reilly was a clone of the Amazing Spider-Man. Oddly, Reilly was himself as amazing as lint. He created a lame alter ego, the Scarlet Spider, and died. If his grave was real, we would have danced on it.

BOBA FETT

LAST SEEN: **In the sarlacc's belly**
CLONE OF: **Jango Fett**
Hardly the most feared or competent bounty hunter in the galaxy, Boba Fett met his comical demise at the hands of a blind man with a stick.



DOLLY

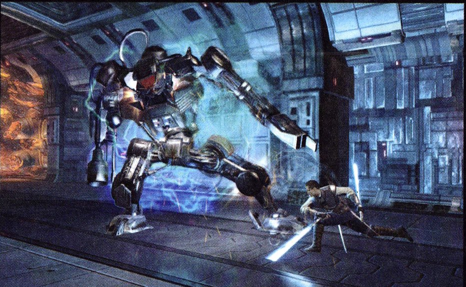
LAST SEEN: **On display at The Royal Museum of Scotland**
CLONE OF: **A sheep**
The British Broadcasting Company called Dolly "the world's most famous sheep," which is not at all impressive for any sheep, living or dead. Dolly was the first mammal to be cloned from adult cells; she lived to be six, and is stuffed for posterity.

“[The Force Unleashed] was an overly ambitious project,” Torres says. “We really wanted to do a lot: New technology, a bunch of enemies, a bunch of everything—a lot of new, new, new. With *TFU2,* we took a look at it and said, ‘You know what? Maybe what we really need to do is scale this, and do less, better.’”

Do not misconstrue. The game still emphasizes the original’s singular vision of Starkiller as a complete and total home wrecker who wields the Force in the manner of 15,000 sledgehammers, give or take. As a tool for destruction and mayhem, the Force remains wholly unleashed, and has been augmented dramatically. It’s just this time around, LucasArts hopes we’ll use Starkiller’s powers in a thoughtful, unrestrained way.

Do less, better, entails paring down the game’s enemies. The first game offered a host of different enemy types, but they were very similar in that they could all be defeated using any of Starkiller’s attacks or powers. Now, there are fewer varieties of foes, but each possesses a special defense or resistance to certain attacks, and thus smart planning will help foster their ignominious defeat or, perhaps, decapitation. Imperial jumptroopers, say, prove too agile for ranged attacks such as Force push. They are, however, susceptible to Force lightning, which causes them to spasm in mid-air before their rocket packs overload and send them to grisly deaths. Electrostaff-wielding riot troopers prove resistant to lightsaber attacks. Once divested of the weapon, the troopers fold like accordions at a hoedown; Starkiller can then get in close to take control of the staff and beat his target with it, or else stay at a distance and use Force grab. The huge shield-wielding carbonite trooper proves resistant to most attacks and almost impossible to approach at close range; it tosses freezing carbonite (again, taken from *Empire Strikes Back)* that can stop Starkiller in his tracks. Killing this behemoth requires some dedicated thought.

“We want you to not buttonmash through an event,” Torres says. “We want you to think more about the setup.”



↖ Lightsabers can be customized with special crystals, but here we see Starkiller opting for blue lightsabers over the red-hued blades traditionally favored by evil Jedi.

New Force-based powers add both a strategic element as well as lend weight to the notion of Starkiller as a tool for destruction. The old Jedi mind trick gets a deadly makeover here; the first time we use it on a target, the unfortunate stormtrooper leaps out a window to his doom. In gameplay, the mind trick will befuddle the weak-minded; stricken enemies will fight their friends or blindly assault defense batteries before, well, exploding in a gory spray.

An ultra-powerful Force rage mode allows Starkiller to

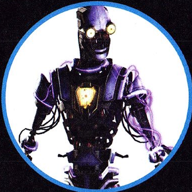
BIT PLAYERS, UNLEASHED!

Rahm Kota

Jedi Kota, who survived his duel with Starkiller in the first game, returns and will need to be rescued from the gorog on Cato Neimoidia. He'll also push Starkiller to strike directly at the Empire, when Starkiller is more inclined to search for Juno Eclipse.

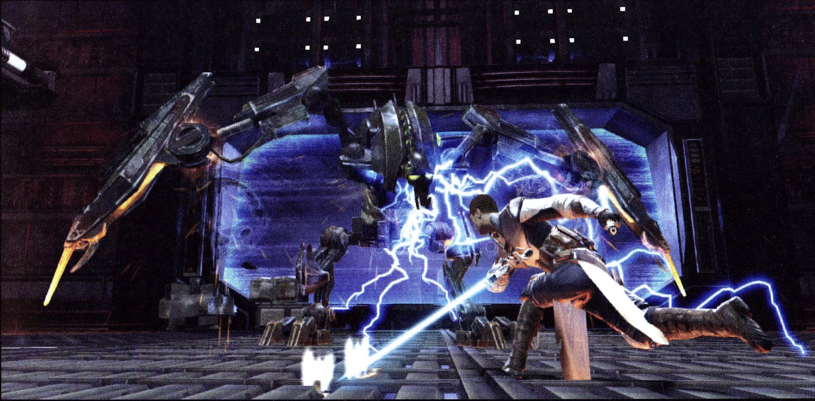
Juno Eclipse

It's a sure bet Starkiller will meet up with Juno, who's now serving with the rebel alliance. Their reunion, according to executive producer Haden Blackman, is one of the last scenes in the game. "I got very emotional watching it," Blackman says.



Proxy

The robotic Proxy sacrificed itself in the first game, but returns for the sequel. With his primary function lost, the robot must rediscover its purpose. "Without [Starkiller], he has to find his own place," says assistant production manager Cameron Suey.



↖ Starkiller escapes death, steals Darth Vader's shuttle, and goes galaxy hopping all for the love of a woman.

go berserk and do incredible damage on multiple enemies. Here, after sufficient destruction, rage mode can be triggered in order to crush AT-STs (the walking tanks first seen in *Empire Strikes Back);* possess multiple stormtroopers; shoot lightning in huge, sweeping arcs; and perform exaggeratedly deadly lightsaber combinations.

Combat proved to be one of *Unleashed's* great strengths, but it was also one that the developers relied on too heavily, and to the exclusion of other elements. Unlike its predecessor, *Unleashed 2* won't be single-mindedly fixated on combat. "We want to make sure we improve the experience from a pacing perspective," Torres says. "We felt like *TFU* was just continuous fighting; it was just non-stop fight, fight, fight, fight, fight. We felt the game started to feel repetitive."

"For *TFU2,* we created pacing mechanics," he continues, "where you have time to absorb the moment, feel the payoff, move forward, take a breath or two, and then continue—without going so far that you don't get a sense of urgency; we want to keep that."

Targeting, too, proved a weak spot for the original game. Torres says it was just too hard for players to pick out a specific object and grab it. The technology and level design combined to form a sort of morass that made it difficult for players to be precise in their targeting. This will change with fewer items to target, and an emphasis on making such junk more advantageously located and palatable.

Leaping into the fray proves remarkably like going home again—thus proving it is possible to do so, albeit highly devastating to stormtroopers in the general vicinity.

The initial sequence has us free-falling from great heights on the rain-soaked planet of Kamino. It's all a rapidly approaching blur of metal grating, narrow circular openings, and circling TIE fighters, with the goal being, of course, to use the Force to blast through openings, destroy obstacles, and wreck the enemy. Torres advises jamming on the Circle button to create blasts of Force energy, something that proves both wise and useful. The scene culminates with a plunge through a glass dome, and the game begins its torrent of destruction in earnest.

Destruction allows for the collection of Force points that can, in turn, be used to augment Starkiller's abilities. As the powers are upgraded, more advanced combinations can be performed, mind trickery lasts longer on the weak-willed, and lightning arcs across multiple targets. These upgrades don't influence the excessively overpowered Force rage abilities; those stay consistently locked at, to swipe liberally from *This Is Spinal Tap,* 11.

LucasArts has generously boosted our powers for the purposes of this demonstration, allowing us to test out a range of Force powers. We're introduced to the mind trick. The first afflicted stormtrooper commits suicide, jumping out a window. The mind trick quickly moves up to the top of the pops in terms of our favorite Force technique. It's a quick and easy way to turn an enemy into an ally, and this proves invaluable during the initial stages where bulb-like gun batteries offer a decent threat to the hero. Stormtroopers who are under the influence of the mind trick will often rush off to kill themselves by leaping into these batteries, destroying two problems at once and freeing us up to ponder more creative bouts of mayhem.

The game doles out the cannon fodder, allowing us to get reacquainted with using Force powers. Waves of enemies flood out, and we dispatch some by picking them up and hurling their limp bodies against red-hued forcefields. Others are eliminated with lightning. Bonus cruelty points are awarded for striking a target with lightning and then picking up the spasming stormtrooper and tossing him into his friends for a grenade-like effect. Other stormtroopers are lead to their deaths by luring them into a target circle provided by the gun batteries; once the targets have entered the circle's radius, we zip away, leaving them to their grisly fate.

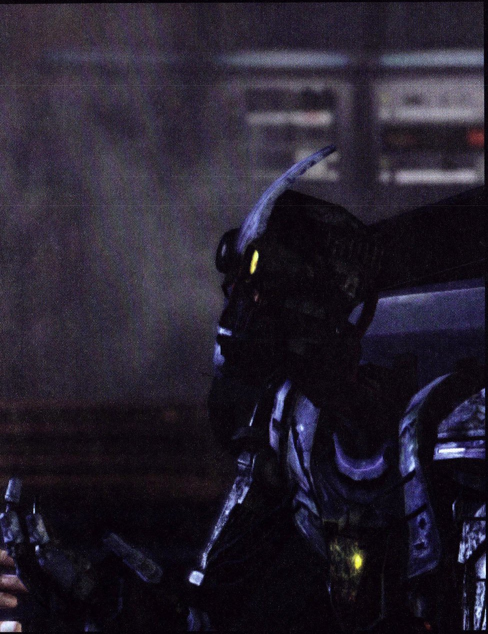
Next, we find ourselves in a long, window-filled corridor, where an enemy ship assaults Starkiller. This seems a good time to dash—repeatedly—to safety, although the game's jarring perspective shift makes it easy to dash toward the carnage instead of away from it. Although easily dismissed, this scene's introduction and its aftermath highlight LucasArts' intent to pace the game better; the ebb and flow between the fierce action moments and downtime is certainly highlighted.

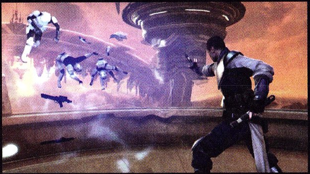
The game introduces more foes: lightsaber-carrying acolytes, airborne jumptroopers, and riot guards. At times, when the enemies are mixed, it's enlightening to mind trick one type and see how it fares against another. Yet it can't be stressed enough: sometimes violence needs to be up close and personal. We grab a riot trooper's electrostaff, beat him with it, and with a practiced disdain, toss it on the sucker's prone, semiconscious form. When it comes time to defeat the liquid-spraying carbonite trooper, we use the Force grab to divest it of its shield, and then move in to cut off its spraying arm. The thing freezes and, when Force pushed, shatters delightfully.

We're introduced to the mind trick. The first afflicted stormtrooper commits suicide, jumping out a window. The mind trick quickly moves up to the top of the pops in terms of our favorite Force technique.

Our revels end after bits of platforming, hucking TIE fighters to knock down a tower to create a bridge and, of course, one potentially deadly scene featuring a squad of stormtroopers flanked by two AT-STs. Luckily, the game introduces Force rage here; and a blur of mind tricks, lightning, and Force gripping ensures the walkers are crushed, the stormtroopers all taken over at once, and then fried like eggs.

Oh, and we steal Vader's personal TIE fighter on the way out. Take that, Dark Lord of the Sith.





CIRCULAR LOGIC

New to *Unleashed 2* is a timed, leaderboard-based challenge mode wherein players can compete in simple contests. We took up the fight in King of the Hill, where the goal was to defend a circular area against a torrent of stormtroopers. Our strategy was to mind trick foes before they reached the circle, but the violent explosion of power from Force repulse works very well, too.

There will be more of these challenges throughout the game, LucasArts promises.

↖ Starkiller reunites with the robot Proxy. Proxy, LucasArts says, has his own character arc and issues to deal with. For starters, the thing has to find a new purpose for its existence.

Two specific technologies were tapped to power the original *Unleashed.* Digital Molecular Matter (DMM) made it possible for steel to bend, glass to shatter, and plant life to sway realistically. Its counterpart, Euphoria, imbued all the game's non-player characters with a functioning central nervous system allowing for all kinds of responses to stimuli: They attempted to keep their balance, grabbed at objects, and flailed when tossed.

In this way, LucasArts achieved something tangible if not remarkable. *Unleashed* was a dazzling technology demo translated into an entertaining game. It accomplished its mission in bridging the gap between the *Star Wars* prequels and the original film trilogy, introducing an intriguing cast of characters, offering a wonderful reimagining of the Force, and establishing a franchise.

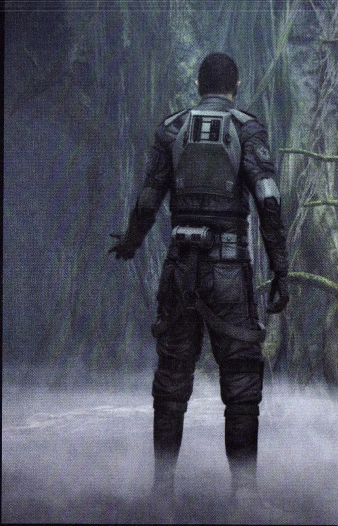
Star Wars has always emphasized technology and action, so it seems a welcome change that the developers are pushing a more…thoughtful approach to *Unleashed 2.* Beyond the notion of improving the game and its mechanics, there's also a very real sense LucasArts has a story to tell, one that involves people and not just classic archetypes.

"He's damaged goods more than anything," Blackman says about Starkiller. The previous game saw the hero as almost wholly reactive, a deadly combination of Force-powered puppet and wrecking ball. After his captivity and reemergence, Starkiller (be he clone or original) will seek to become his own man in the face of conflicting desires. With the backdrop of the war between the rebels and Empire taking place all around him, Starkiller's allies will push him toward fighting, but the need to discover his identity and find his love Eclipse might prove too strong.

It's interesting to note Starkiller begins the game with two red-bladed lightsabers, traditionally the color favored by evil Jedi. Later scenes show Starkiller with two blue-bladed sabers, possibly indicating a sea change. LucasArts notes there's a contextual reason for all this, but also suggests players can alter lightsabers with hue- and power-modifying crystals.

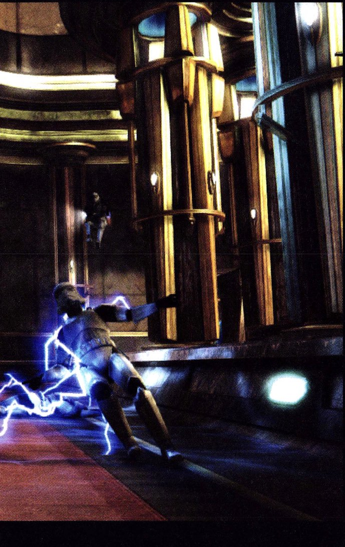
In the end, it may not matter whether Starkiller is a clone or not. *Star Wars'* lore says it's impossible to clone a Jedi, and the wise General Kota echoes this sentiment. In the end, as Kota says, "It doesn't even matter. Be who you are." Clone or not, Starkiller seems poised to emerge as a *character.* And that, along with the great opportunity to lop off heads aplenty with a lightsaber, seems a fine selling point. ■

There's also a very real sense LucasArts has a story to tell, one that involves people and not just classic archetypes.



↗ Welcome to Dagobah. Starkiller meets Yoda, who points the Jedi in the direction of the cave of evil.

↘ The game begins on the waterlogged planet of Kamino, first seen in the *Star Wars* prequels.



YODA AND BOBA FETT, FAILURES!

Star Wars, as a franchise, is noted for its spectacular character failures. Greedo misses Han Solo from point-blank range. Solo proves incompetent in keeping his beloved spaceship in operating condition. Admiral Ackbar's first (and only) reaction to danger is to order a retreat.

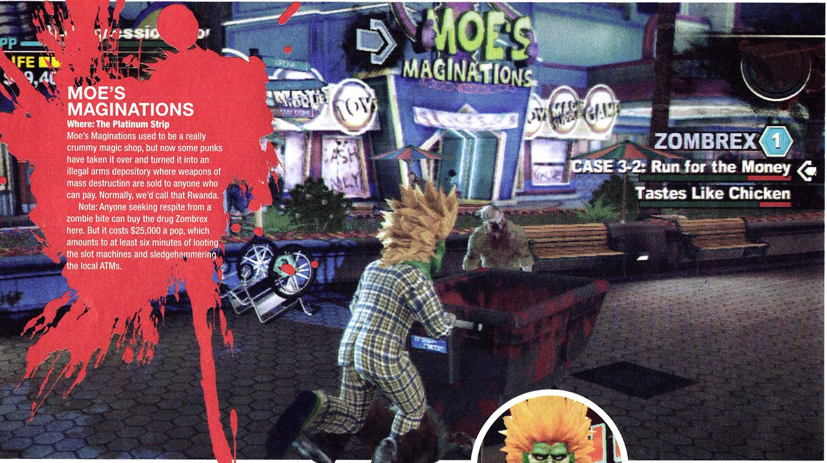
Neither Yoda nor Boba Fett is immune to this. Boba Fett shoots a rope at a Jedi, has to have Darth Vader capture Han Solo for him, and ultimately dies in a tragically unfunny burp gag. Yoda fails to kill the Emperor Palpatine but, more importantly, will forever be known as the Jedi who trained the malevolent Count Dooku.

FRIG

FI

HT GHT

One's goofy, the other is gory. One's got zombies, the other is infested with necromorphs. *Dead Rising 2* and *Dead Space 2* are coming to PS3, and PTOM's got exclusive hands-on survival guides for both games.



MOE'S MAGINATIONS

Where: The Platinum Strip
Moe's Maginations used to be a really crummy magic shop, but now some punks have taken it over and turned it into an illegal arms depository where weapons of mass destruction are sold to anyone who can pay. Normally, we'd call that Rwanda.

Note: Anyone seeking respite from a zombie bite can buy the drug Zombrex here. But it costs $25,000 a pop, which amounts to at least six minutes of looting the slot machines and sledgehammering the local ATMs.

Pay to Slay

Smart Shopping in a Zombie Apocalypse

By Chuck Greene in a Blanka mask as told to Greg Orlando

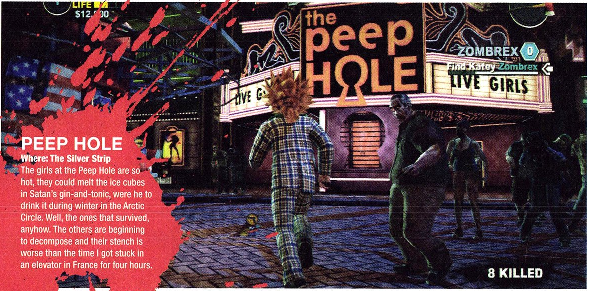
Welcome to *Dead Rising 2's* Fortune City. Under normal circumstances, I'd advise visitors to slather on the sunscreen, enjoy the beautiful views, partake of our wonderful nightlife and delicious cuisines, and hit it big at the blackjack tables. However, since the zombies took over, I can only recommend guns, liquor, more guns, and cowering behind reinforced concrete and steel.

That's not to say Fortune City's not fun anymore. For those inclined to stick their hands into wasp's nests, bait bears, wrestle with alligators, and cross freeway traffic, Fortune City is *a hell of a lot of fun.*

I'm Chuck Greene in a Blanka mask, and I'm here to help. This guide is here to help. Because a zombie wasteland shouldn't interfere with any American's shopping agenda.

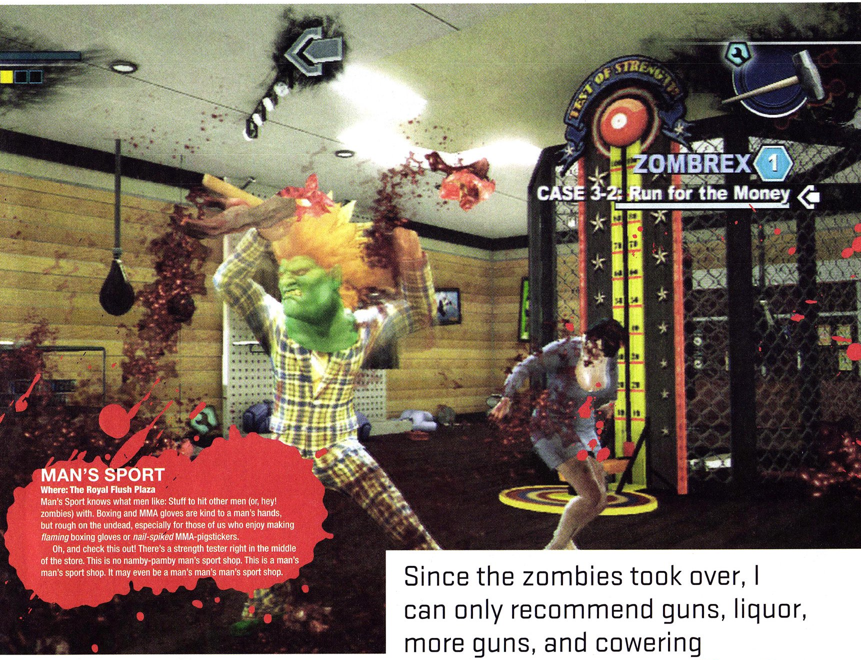
Fortune City has everything. I won't lie. It's here, and with the law 72-or-so hours away, prices are merely a suggestion.

Take it from me, Chuck Greene, you can't go wrong with the bargains in this town. Happy shopping!



PEEP HOLE

Where: The Silver Strip
The girls at the Peep Hole are so hot, they could melt the ice cubes in Satan's gin-and-tonic, were he to drink it during winter in the Arctic Circle. Well, the ones that survived, anyhow. The others are beginning to decompose and their stench is worse than the time I got stuck in an elevator in France for four hours.



MAN'S SPORT

Where: The Royal Flush Plaza

Man's Sport knows what men like: Stuff to hit other men (or, hey! zombies) with. Boxing and MMA gloves are kind to a man's hands, but rough on the undead, especially for those of us who enjoy making *flaming* boxing gloves or *nail-spiked* MMA-pigstickers.

Oh, and check this out! There's a strength tester right in the middle of the store. This is no namby-pamby man's sport shop. This is a man's man's sport shop. It may even be a man's man's man's sport shop.

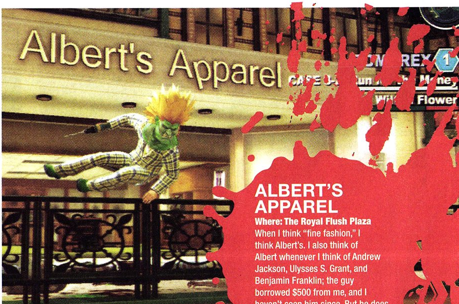
Since the zombies took over, I can only recommend guns, liquor, more guns, and cowering

MANOR
COMING SOON

CHILDREN'S CASTLE

Where: The Royal Flush Plaza

I have a child, and when she's not almost turning into a zombie, she's craving the latest in childhood amusements. Now, as a parent, I know that stuff is insanely expensive and, frankly, I'm not made of money. But now that everything is just free for the taking, I heartily recommend the Children's Castle. They have these cool toy helicopters I'm hoping someday to turn into cool, *deadly,* toy helicopters, and also these excellent goblin masks that allow me to run around this shopper's paradise strapped to the gills with heavy armaments yelling, "*I'm a MONSTER!*" It's funny, because after killing my 1,324th zombie, it's absolutely true.



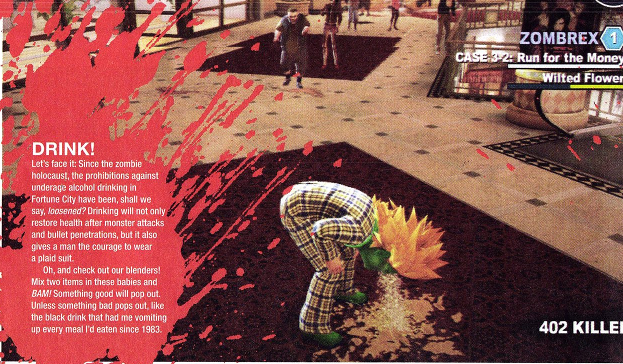
ALBERT'S APPAREL

Where: The Royal Flush Plaza

When I think "fine fashion," I think Albert's. I also think of Albert whenever I think of Andrew Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant, and Benjamin Franklin; the guy borrowed $500 from me, and I haven't seen him since. But he does know a fine suit when he sees it.

That's just the tip of this zombie-caked iceberg. Fortune City is more than just a collection of emporiums infested by reeking hordes of the flesh-eating. It's a home away from home complete with fine dining, nightlife aplenty, and the chance to win big at the casinos.

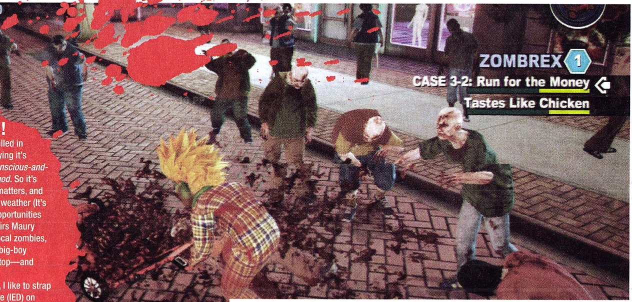
Take it from me, Chuck Greene in a Blanka mask, Fortune City won't disappoint. It may kill, but it will never, ever disappoint.



DRINK!

Let's face it: Since the zombie holocaust, the prohibitions against underage alcohol drinking in Fortune City have been, shall we say, *loosened?* Drinking will not only restore health after monster attacks and bullet penetrations, but it also gives a man the courage to wear a plaid suit.

Oh, and check out our blenders! Mix two items in these babies and *BAM!* Something good will pop out. Unless something bad pops out, like the black drink that had me vomiting up every meal I'd eaten since 1983.



SLAUGHTER!

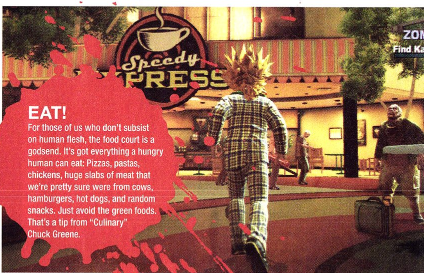
I'm not saying it's kill-or-be-killed in Fortune City right now. I'm saying it's *kill-or-be-eaten-while-still-conscious-and-screaming-to-an-indifferent-god.* So it's best to be proactive in these matters, and instead of discussing our fine weather (It's always warm!) or our many opportunities for culture (The local station airs Maury Povich twice-daily) with the local zombies, I recommend you slap on the big-boy pants—or the woman's tube-top—and get straight to killing.

Go ahead, get creative. Me, I like to strap an improvised explosive device (IED) on one stinking zombie, and a fountain lizard on another, and then shoot the IED. I look at it this way: one of those zombies may well grow up to be zombie Hitler. And no one wants that.

Just avoid the green foods. That's a tip from "Culinary" Chuck Greene.

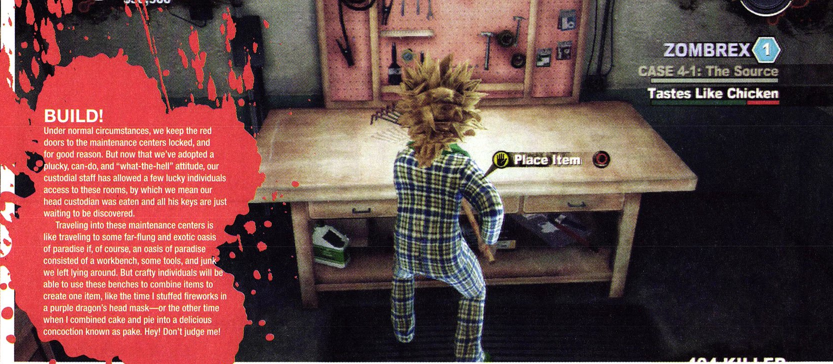
READ!

Reading is fundamental? Zombies are very impressed by juicy, chess-club cerebrums, Brainiac. Although I suppose certain books do offer advantages for the intrepid adventurer in Fortune City. The tradeoff is that these books have to be toted around, which takes up valuable arm space that could be better used for holding weapons and liquor.



EAT!

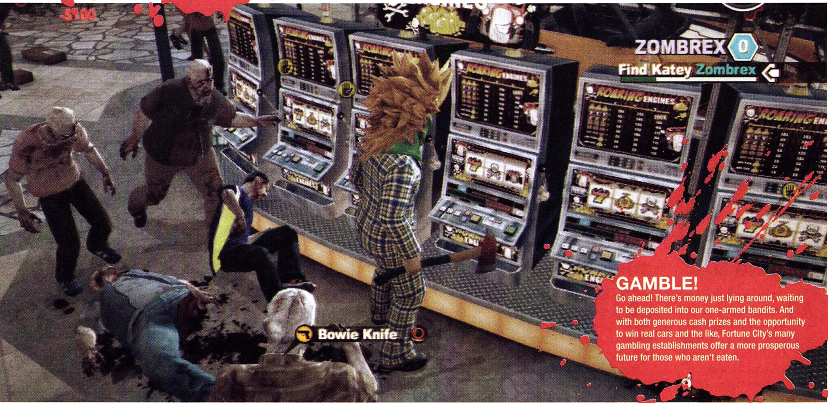
For those of us who don't subsist on human flesh, the food court is a godsend. It's got everything a hungry human can eat: Pizzas, pastas, chickens, huge slabs of meat that we're pretty sure were from cows, hamburgers, hot dogs, and random snacks. Just avoid the green foods. That's a tip from "Culinary" Chuck Greene.



BUILD!

Under normal circumstances, we keep the red doors to the maintenance centers locked, and for good reason. But now that we've adopted a plucky, can-do, and "what-the-hell" attitude, our custodial staff has allowed a few lucky individuals access to these rooms, by which we mean our head custodian was eaten and all his keys are just waiting to be discovered.

Traveling into these maintenance centers is like traveling to some far-flung and exotic oasis of paradise if, of course, an oasis of paradise consisted of a workbench, some tools, and junk we left lying around. But crafty individuals will be able to use these benches to combine items to create one item, like the time I stuffed fireworks in a purple dragon's head mask—or the other time when I combined cake and pie into a delicious concoction known as pake. Hey! Don't judge me!



GAMBLE!

Go ahead! There's money just lying around, waiting to be deposited into our one-armed bandits. And with both generous cash prizes and the opportunity to win real cars and the like, Fortune City's many gambling establishments offer a more prosperous future for those who aren't eaten.

ZOMB
Tastes Lik
Here Comes

LOVE!

Found Mr. Right or, perhaps, Mr. Right-This-Instant? Then head to our famous chapel, where an on-call reverend is ready to serve up steaming hot nuptials. Or just sit in on a ceremony. I am not lying when I say the Unified Universalist Church has sanctified our chapel as the 43rd most holy mall marriage center *in the nation!*

ZOMBREX 2
CASE 5-2: The Getaway

COME, STAY, PLAY!

So come to Fortune City! Forget rules and civilization and have a good time *all the time!* Take it from me, Chuck Greene in a Blanka mask, Fortune City isn't immediately fatal. And that's damn well good enough for me.

How to Survive a Necromorph Outbreak

A helpful hands-on guide from PTOM's Committee for Health and Safety

By Scott Butterworth

In space, death surrounds us at all times. A few inches of flimsy metal and insulation are all that separates us from asphyxiation, hypothermia, and the chilling embrace of an infinite, empty grave. And then there are the flesh-eating monsters.

With so much danger lurking (literally) around every corner, how could one ever hope to survive the perils of *Dead Space 2?* Simple: Heed the advice of those who have traversed its treacherous halls and escaped alive. In this case, us.

1

Know Yourself

BLEEDING MAN

Ⓐ The intimidating figure with the plasma cutter is stoic protagonist Isaac Clarke. Don't be fooled, though: Clarke may be pretty handy with a set of laser-powered mining tools, but he's no space marine. He's merely an engineer who's found himself locked in a deep space nightmare. Twice.

After dismembering his way through the horrific events of the original game, Clarke's now slightly more experienced and capable, but the loss of his crew and the suicide of his girlfriend may have left him traumatized. "Within the *Dead Space* universe, there's this concept of 'dementia' and how it intersects with Isaac," executive producer Steve Papoutsis hints. "The story is definitely more centered around what's going on with him and his mind."

GUNS UP

Ⓑ Clarke may still be a mild-mannered engineer, but that doesn't make his arsenal any less deadly.

The classic limb-severing plasma cutters function in much the same fashion as in the first game, as does Clarke's stasis power, which freezes objects and enemies in place.

The pulse rifle, however, feels beefier, and his kinesis power can now be used to launch debris into nearby foes.

Rounding out the weaponry is the all-new, ultra-satisfying Javelin Gun, which sends spears sailing towards targets and impales them to the wall. The reload time is somewhat unforgiving, but the resultant bloody mess is worth it.

ANTI-GRAVITY

Ⓒ In the previous game Clarke could only launch himself from point to point in a zero-gravity scenario. Now, he has exchanged his magnetic boots for jets allowing him to maneuver freely. "We really want to open it up and give the player more control over their movement," Papoutsis explains. "Players have to weave through certain areas and, of course, have enemies they can combat while floating in those spaces."

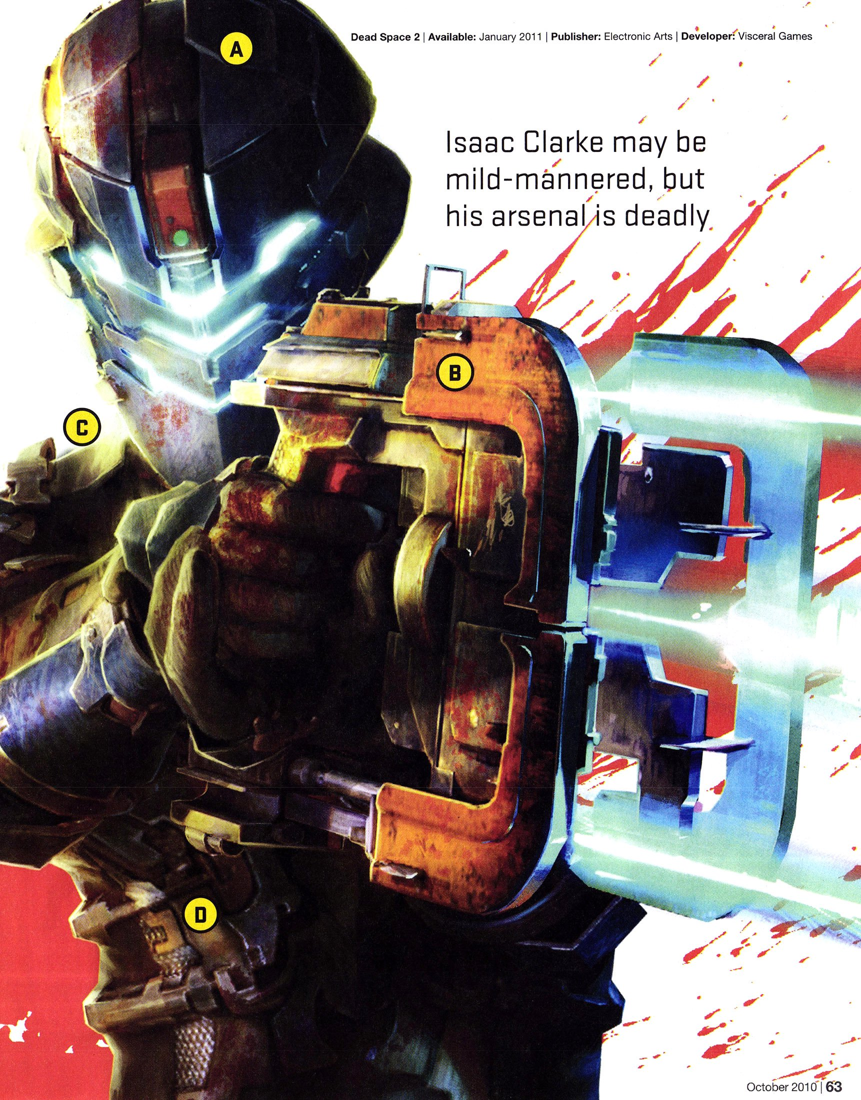
When floating in zero gravity, Isaac moves and controls much like he would if he were swimming, but we found the experience to be fairly intuitive and had no problem avoiding a few spinning fan blades or jetting through a rapidly closing portal. We didn't see any flying Necromorphs, though.

DRESSED TO KILL

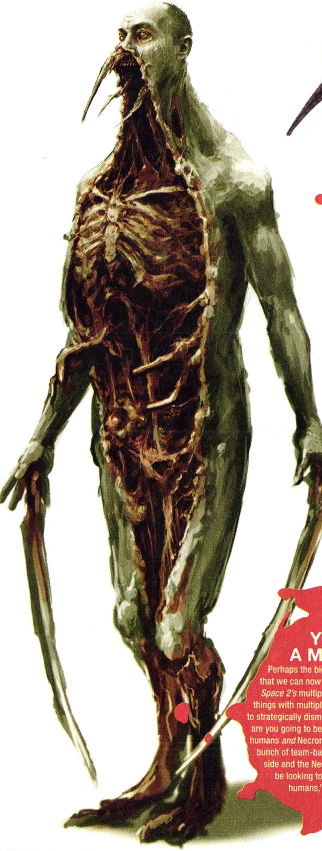
Ⓓ Isaac's ability to upgrade his equipment once again relies on collecting power nodes and locating workbenches. This time, however, Clarke can upgrade his suits as well. "If you like one particular suit, you should be able to make that the maxed out suit," Papoutsis says. Though Papoutsis also hinted that each suit might have its own unique advantages, players can stick with the look they like best rather than being forced to use the most recently unlocked suit. Just be sure to choose upgrades wisely.

Dead Space 2 | **Available:** January 2011 | **Publisher:** Electronic Arts | **Developer:** Visceral Games

Isaac Clarke may be mild-mannered, but his arsenal is deadly



2 Know Your Enemy



MEET YOUR MARKER

The monsters of the *Dead Space* universe are a nightmarish mashup of zombies and aliens. They first appeared on a derelict deep-space mining vessel where a mysterious artifact called The Marker unleashed a sentient alien pathogen that reanimates human corpses, turning them into grotesque monsters called Necromorphs.

Though The Marker was destroyed at the end of the first game, the government is now attempting to create an artificial Marker (or perhaps resurrect the original) but has produced another Necromorph outbreak in the process. Naturally, it's up to Clarke—who survived the initial outbreak—to unravel the conspiracy, destroy the new Marker, and avoid being maimed or eaten along the way.

Classic Necromorphs look even more gruesome

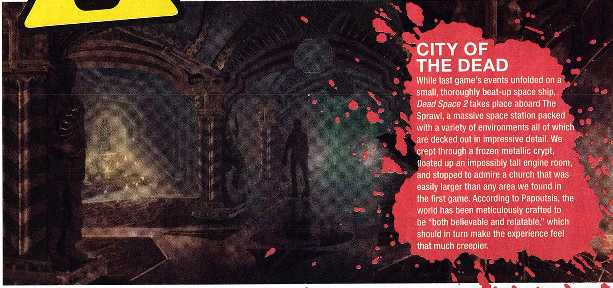
MIGHTY MORPHIN'

The classic Necromorph types look even more gruesome than before, but they still employ the same terrifying tricks: playing dead, bursting through windows, even adapting their combat styles as Clarke picks off their limbs. They continually claw their way toward him until Clarke curbstomps the extra-tenacious ones. Fortunately, the unique "strategic dismemberment" approach to combat remains a fun and intensely effective method of dealing with the horde.

YOU'RE A MONSTER

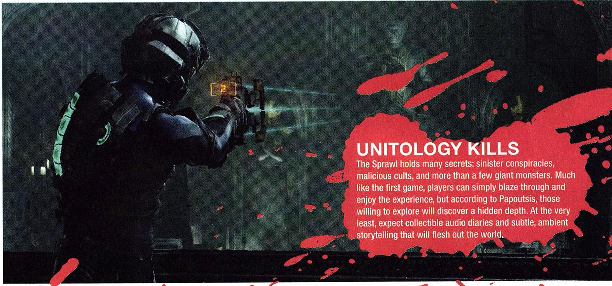
Perhaps the biggest Necromorph news is that we can now *become* one, thanks to *Dead Space 2's* multiplayer modes. "One of the big things with multiplayer is you're going to be able to strategically dismember your friends. But not only are you going to be able to do that playing as both humans *and* Necromorphs, we've also got a whole bunch of team-based objectives for the human side and the Necromorphs are just going to be looking to tear the s#%! out of the humans," Papoutsis explains.

3 Know Your Surroundings



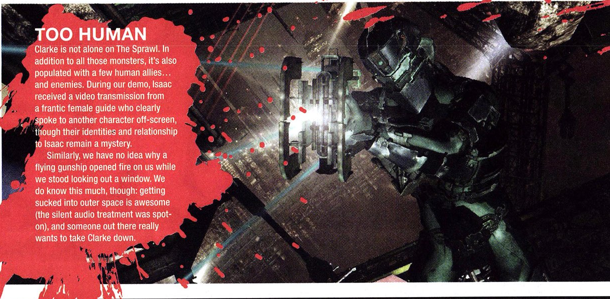
CITY OF THE DEAD

While last game's events unfolded on a small, thoroughly beat-up space ship, *Dead Space 2* takes place aboard The Sprawl, a massive space station packed with a variety of environments all of which are decked out in impressive detail. We crept through a frozen metallic crypt, floated up an impossibly tall engine room, and stopped to admire a church that was easily larger than any area we found in the first game. According to Papoutsis, the world has been meticulously crafted to be "both believable and relatable," which should in turn make the experience feel that much creepier.



UNITOLOGY KILLS

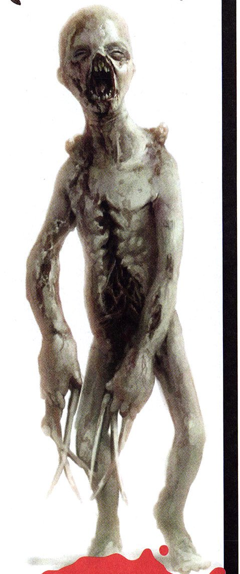
The Sprawl holds many secrets: sinister conspiracies, malicious cults, and more than a few giant monsters. Much like the first game, players can simply blaze through and enjoy the experience, but according to Papoutsis, those willing to explore will discover a hidden depth. At the very least, expect collectible audio diaries and subtle, ambient storytelling that will flesh out the world.



TOO HUMAN

Clarke is not alone on The Sprawl. In addition to all those monsters, it's also populated with a few human allies… and enemies. During our demo, Isaac received a video transmission from a frantic female guide who clearly spoke to another character off-screen, though their identities and relationship to Isaac remain a mystery.

Similarly, we have no idea why a flying gunship opened fire on us while we stood looking out a window. We do know this much, though: getting sucked into outer space is awesome (the silent audio treatment was spot-on), and someone out there really wants to take Clarke down.



HORROR-IFIC

A small handful of new Necromorphs have been added to the *Dead Space* menagerie, including the two we recently met face to face: The Puker and The Pack. The Puker looks almost like any other Necromorph until it begins to spew an endless stream of alien bile at Isaac, which makes it painfully difficult to aim. Even without its head, a Puker will continue to hose Clarke with its venom.

As annoying as that sounds, The Pack is even more difficult to handle. These creepy toddler-monsters swarm the hero; spraying them with the pulse rifle was the only way we could keep them at bay, and even then we occasionally had to complete a quick-time decapitation sequence to keep them off of us.

JOE DANGER and the triumphs of indie game development

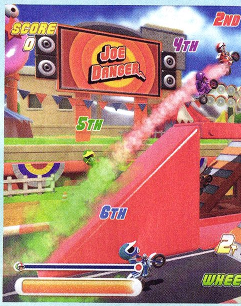
How PSN kick-started PS3's creative boom

PUBLISHERS
CO
OVER
BIG
REST
BUDGETS
IN

SURGE+
2
MPROMISE
HEADS
ICTIONS
TERFERENC
DEADLINES
HUGE
TEAMS

Flip to read on ›

"The development budget for *Joe Danger* wouldn't have covered the front-end menus in *Burnout: Paradise.*"



Sick of generic sci-fi shooters and sequels? Indie games offer a progressive, creative, and imaginative alternative, and with PSN it's easier than ever for small teams to get their games in everyone's hands. With minimal distribution costs, and less budgetary and publisher pressure, it's the developer's vision released to the world in its purest form.

On a basic level, "indie" means a development team—or single person—that isn't owned or controlled by anyone. This means smaller teams producing shorter, cheaper games. Not only that, but the independence guarantees them a level of creative control that, for example, an in-house team at Ubisoft would kill for.

But "indie" also represents much more. "I think the theme of the indie scene for me is games that have personality," says Sean Murray, founder of independent studio Hello Games. "Something you play and can imagine the person who made it. That's why I think the indie scene has grown so much recently: There's something missing in the mainstream that developers like us want to fill. This is why there'll always be a place in the market for both the million dollar mega-hits and the small independent games with bags of personality."

"When I joined the games industry, it was my dream job," Murray continues. "I'd been making games since I was a kid, and joining Criterion [developer of the *Burnout* series] as a coder was an amazing opportunity. I was in a company with some of the most talented developers in the world. But I never stopped thinking about making my own game and forming my own company."

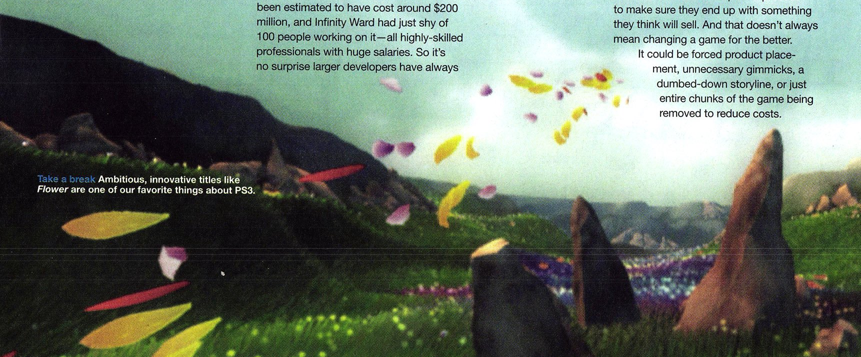
Risk and Reward

And that's exactly what he did. Hello Games is a team of four: Murray, Grant Duncan, David Ream and Ryan Doyle—all of whom had stable, full-time jobs in the games industry, but left to go it on their own. "We had an instant connection," Murray says. "Our new game, *Joe Danger,* is a really personal project for us and way more than just a job. It was tough on our families and partners at first—they thought we were completely insane. But we knew what we were letting ourselves in for, despite the risk, and had massive excited grins on our faces when we told them."

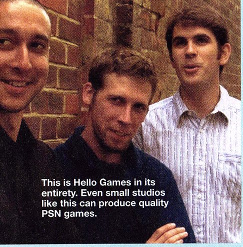
Making a standard big budget, triple-A blockbuster is a costly business. *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2,* for example, has been estimated to have cost around $200 million, and Infinity Ward had just shy of 100 people working on it—all highly-skilled professionals with huge salaries. So it's no surprise larger developers have always relied on publishers for funding and assistance with distribution and marketing. "The entire development budget for *Joe Danger,*" Murray says, "wouldn't have even covered the front-end menus in *Burnout: Paradise.*"

The trouble with the above system is that videogame publishers need to see a return on their investment, and can often interfere with the development process to make sure they end up with something they think will sell. And that doesn't always mean changing a game for the better.

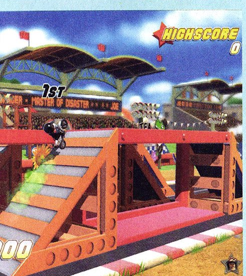
It could be forced product placement, unnecessary gimmicks, a dumbed-down storyline, or just entire chunks of the game being removed to reduce costs.



Take a break Ambitious, innovative titles like *Flower* are one of our favorite things about PS3.



This is Hello Games in its entirety. Even small studios like this can produce quality PSN games.



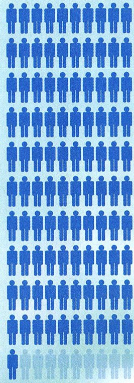
Joe Danger is addictive, charming, and colorful—and right at home on PSN.

Indie developers, on the other hand, aren't owned or controlled by anyone, and they're usually a lot smaller—thatgamecompany, creator of *Flower*, has just a 10-man development staff. And Hello Games is even smaller. This means it can take risks or make decisions other developers can't without a man in a suit telling it off. It doesn't inherently make indie games better, but it can make them more interesting. Would a big publisher like, say, Activision release and

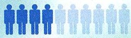
How big are dev teams?

In-house vs. indie

MODERN WARFARE 2
Infinity Ward: 101 team members

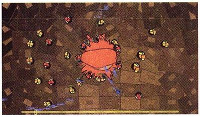


JOE DANGER
Hello Games: 4 team members



PSN's best indie games

Five amazing indie games you have to own

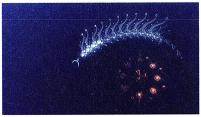


Best for... Creativity

Everyday Shooter

The first surprising thing is this game's soundtrack. Rather than the usual techno junk plaguing every other shoot-'em-up, *Everyday Shooter* features a guitar-led soundtrack, with each level's sound effects consisting of musical motifs harmonizing with the tunes.

How it plays Each level's structure—that is, the behavior and appearance of certain enemies—mirrors the structure of the music. And if that wasn't enough, each level features its own unique scoring mechanic, forcing players to figure out how to chain kills to maximize points.

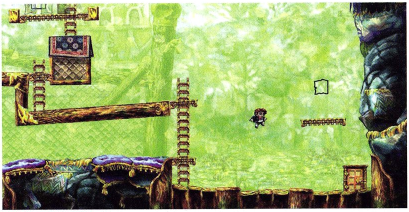


Best for... Originality

flOw

Dismissed by many as an interactive screensaver, *flOw* is an acquired taste. But there's a lot more going on than most people realize. Here, players become a microscopic lifeform, which swims around eating other microscopic lifeforms, gets bigger, and swims deeper.

How it plays What's really clever is the game's visuals and sound design—which some might lazily describe as a bit trippy—actually have their own aesthetic language. Every shape, every color change, and every noise has a specific meaning to keep players informed about what's going on.



Best for... Genius puzzles

Braid

Jonathan Blow's *Braid* is a shining example of everything that's great about indie games. On the surface, it's a sort of *Super Mario Bros.* meets *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time.* But it's also a game of stunning art design, delightfully pretentious metaphors, and some out-of-the-box thinking.

How it plays Tim has the ability to rewind time as much and as often as he wants, but time itself behaves differently in each of the game's worlds—forcing players into a different mindset every time they progress. There's no good reason not to own it.

Best for... Relaxation

Flower

Easily the jewel in the crown as far as PS3 indie-exclusives go, *Flower* is a gaming experience like no other. Next time somebody wants to criticize videogames or claim they're all about violence, do us a favor and explain to them there's a critically and commercially successful game where the goal is to control a gust of wind that flies around restoring life to an arid landscape.

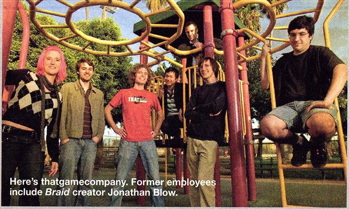
How it plays Words can't do justice to the experience of cutting through valleys, listening to the rustle of the grass and watching the ground explode with color. This is one of the most beautiful games ever made.

Best for... Quality gameplay

PixelJunk Shooter

The most recent entry into Q-Games' *PixelJunk* series, *Shooter* is a lot more interesting than its name would imply. While it does feature a solid bit of combat against various aliens and robotic creatures, the game's draw is its shooting combined with physics-based puzzles. The levels feature an array of different materials and substances, all of which interact with each other in unique ways.

How it plays By shooting the liquids players can affect the flow of the lava, oil, water, and more. The game is perfectly paced, always keeping players on their toes by introducing a new substance to deal with just when things start to seem a tad dull.



Here's thatgamecompany. Former employees include *Braid* creator Jonathan Blow.

market something as unique as *Flower?* It wouldn't make sense financially. Not unless the petals had machine guns.

Digital Revolution

In 2003, Valve—developer of the famous *Half-Life* series—was making serious headway with Steam, its digital distribution service that allowed PC-users to buy games online and simply download them. But in those days, releasing something for a console generally meant putting it on a disc and charging $50 for it. The higher price point meant consumers expected a level of polish and an amount of content a smaller development team just couldn't realistically deliver.

Then the release of the Xbox 360 and PS3 introduced digital distribution to consoles, opening up a whole new audience to smaller developers. “I think the main reason consoles started using digital distribution is because they saw that Steam was doing so well—they wanted a piece of the action,” says Robin Lacey of Beatnik Games, developer of upcoming PSN title *Plain Sight.* “We all love making games, but we need to get paid. Steam proved that you could run a small development studio in a commercially viable manner without publishers.”

Theoretically, anyone could stick a game on PSN for $1, and if enough people buy it, it would be profitable. But this would never work with a disc-based game. Thatgamecompany's Kellee Santiago says: “Digital distribution has opened up the possibilities for alternative business models in game development, publishing, and distribution, therefore opening up the possibilities for what kind of games get made, and who makes them. Our company could not have flourished 10 years ago. By making downloadable games, we are able to make titles for a lot less money and make games that are smaller and cost less for the consumer—which wasn't a possibility when the industry was bound to producing discs.”

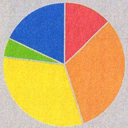
flOw is weird, wonderful, and strangely soothing to play.

Who makes a profit?

The costs

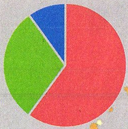
RETAIL GAME

- 🟥 Developer's cut
- 🟧 Publisher's cut
- 🟨 Retail costs
- 🟩 Manufacturing costs
- 🟦 Sony royalties



PSN GAME

- 🟥 Developer's cut
- 🟩 Development costs
- 🟦 Sony royalties



Teething Troubles

Indie developers are responsible for some of the most original and innovative games of the last year or three. Better yet, some of the finest examples are only to be found on the PS3, such as the *PixelJunk* series, *flOw* and *Flower,* and full games *WipEout HD* and *Warhawk.* “The PlayStation Network guys want as many good games as they can get their hands on,” Murray explains. “So once you've proved you have something decent, it's all about just sticking at it and being prepared to fill out quite a few forms.”

The indie dev scene has a few more hurdles to deal with yet—chiefly, the fact gamers often assume a lower price implies a reduced experience.

David Jaffe, the man behind *God of War,* recently wrote a post-mortem for *Calling All Cars,* his company's first PSN title. As well as a couple of gameplay issues, he also cites a misunderstanding of the market at the time as a problem: “I guess it comes down to us gambling wrong in

BIG BUDGETS
DISTRIBUTION
COMPROMISE
HUGE TEAMS

PixelJunk Shooter is one of PSN's most striking and addictive games.

terms of how much entertainment people wanted for their 10 bucks on a—at the time—$600 machine. We just thought, for 10 bucks, people would've been sampling them like candy."

And yet, despite generally favorable reviews, Jaffe's game failed to make an impact. In fact, its online servers have now been shut down entirely; such was the lack of interest. Santiago has a more positive outlook, however: "*Flower* has been nominated for awards from the Academy Of Interactive Arts & Sciences and the Game Developers Conference, in categories that put us up alongside blockbuster titles such as *Assassin's Creed 2* and *Uncharted 2*. It's evidence of what we believe: that a smaller price point is not indicative of quality."

It's still a tough life. "Sometimes it can be a real struggle," Murray says. "We risk a lot spending a couple of years making a game, then crossing our fingers that people will like it. There's a lot less security and a lot more demands, because we have to do everything for ourselves. There are more roles for us to fill than there are people. We don't have a designer, a PR person, or a business manager. There are only four of us and we have to do it all ourselves."

If you're still wary of indie games, think about it this way: The combined cost of all the brilliant PSN titles mentioned on these pages—some which fared extremely well in our reviews—don't even add up to the cost of a single full-price triple-A title. Not only that, indie titles by their very nature—because of the freedom enjoyed by their developers—are some of the most interesting and exciting games around. ■

Why indie will succeed

The numbers

3million
registered PSN users

50%
of PS3 owners are online

65%
download content the first day they connect

↙82%
download at least one piece of content

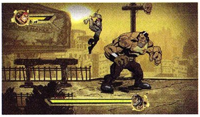
92%
of PSN users are male

79%
are between the age of 18 and 34

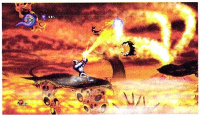
$2,000
The cost of a PS3 development kit

Future PSN classics

Big games from small developers



Toon time It's bright and cartoony, but also the most violent game on PSN.



Worm front Jim's screwball humor is still plenty funny and the HD looks pretty.

1 Shank

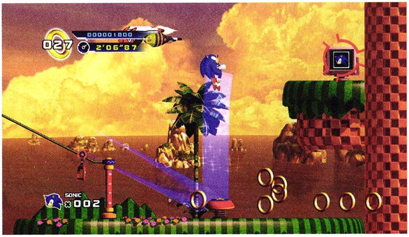
Developer Klei Entertainment | **Out now**

This ultra-violent side-scrolling beat-'em-up looks like a bloody cartoon come to life. The superb art style is courtesy of animators who used to work at Disney and Adult Swim, and the story was written by *God of War* co-creator Marianne Krawczyk. Hero Shank uses grenades, guns, fists, and a chainsaw to tear through unrelenting waves of enemies. Think *Metal Slug,* but much bloodier and with fewer bullets.

2 Earthworm Jim HD

Developer Gameloft | **Out now**

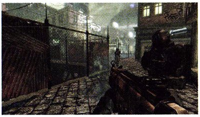
Remember this spineless platform hero? The entire first game, which first appeared on SNES and Sega Genesis in the '90s, has been given a full, high-definition makeover. The gameplay might be old school, but Jim's distinct sense of humor is still intact. Straight ports of old games are just lazy, but lovingly crafted HD remakes are all right in our book, especially if it's one that's as funny and full of fresh platforming action as this one.



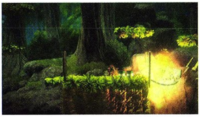
3 Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode One

Developer Dimps | **ETA** Q4

There have been about 500 Sonic games since *Sonic 3* on the Genesis, but this is the true sequel: a back-to-basics platformer with loops and jump pads and Badniks and Doctor Robotnik boss battles. It's being released in episodes, a format we think will become a lot more popular on PSN in months to come. Let's hope it captures the magic of the original games and repairs the damage done to the hedgehog's rep by his sketchy attempts to go next generation.



Shoot to kill This is a fully featured FPS, but distributed digitally. A first for PSN.



Going commando The addition of a jump button may upset purists, but we don't mind.

4 Blacklight: Tango Down

Developer Zombie Studios | **ETA** Q3

Weighing in at two gigabytes, *Tango Down* is bigger than the average DLC game. It's an FPS with co-op modes, online multiplayer and in-depth character customization. And it uses the Unreal engine, so it has graphical clout of a "proper" game. This is a good example of big, full-fat games being released digitally on PSN, giving the developers a freedom they may otherwise not have had working for big publishers.

5 Bionic Commando Rearmed 2

Developer Fatshark | **ETA** TBD 2011

Capcom's 3D remake of *Bionic Commando* was an unfortunate failure, but its 2.5D reimagining was much better. So much so it's decided to make a sequel—only this time, the commando can *jump.* A bold decision considering that the inability to jump in *Bionic* was a core gameplay element, forcing the use of the titular arm to navigate levels. But Capcom will retain the 2.5D game's striking art-style.

tablets
[torture-tested]

YouTube
Music
Video
Camera
Drinking Games
Last.fm
Pandora
Popjump
Google

watches
[dissected]

quadricopters
[explained]

Parrot
Parrot

crazy-ass saws
[We make no promises regarding either the proper or improper uses of reciprocating saws]

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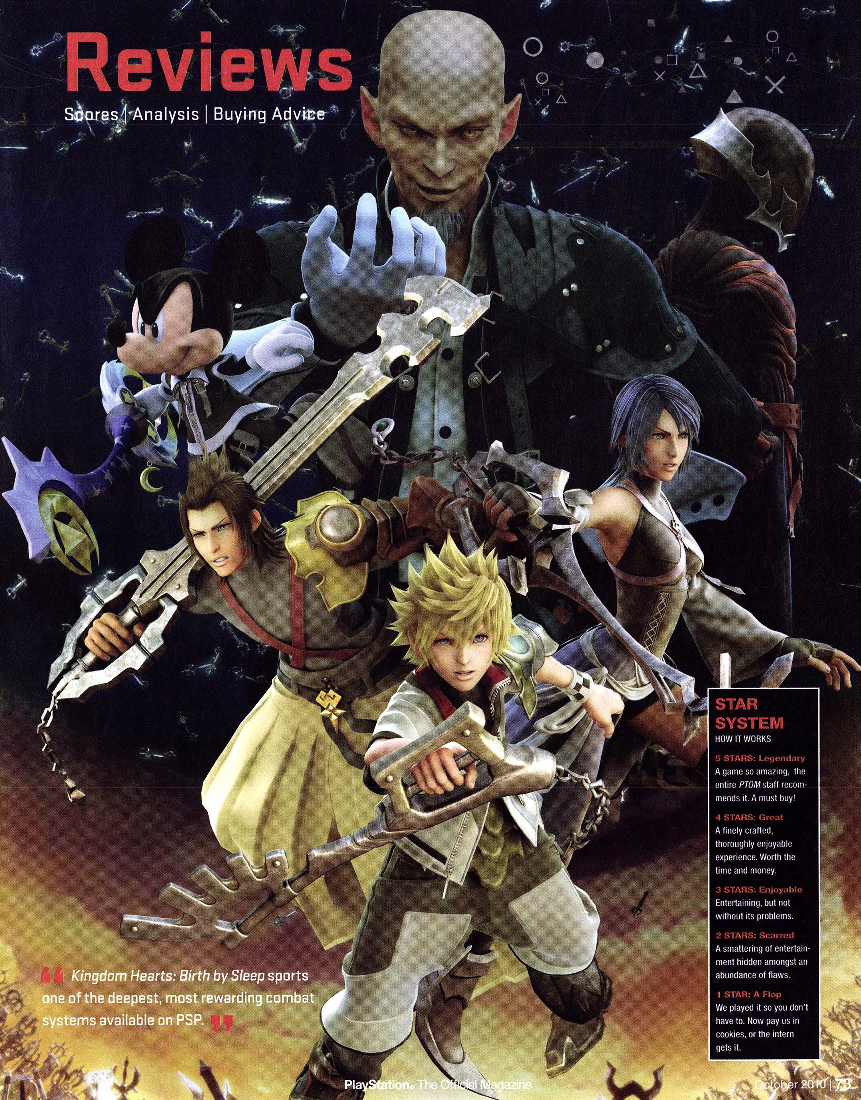


> *Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep* sports one of the deepest, most rewarding combat systems available on PSP.

STAR SYSTEM

HOW IT WORKS

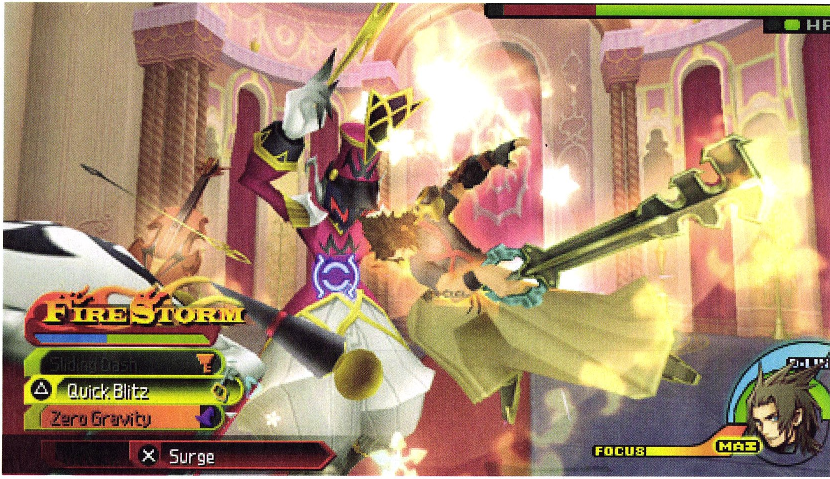
5 STARS: Legendary
A game so amazing, the entire *PTOM* staff recommends it. A must buy!

4 STARS: Great
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth the time and money.

3 STARS: Enjoyable
Entertaining, but not without its problems.

2 STARS: Scarred
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

1 STAR: A Flop
We played it so you don't have to. Now pay us in cookies, or the intern gets it.



KINGDOM HEARTS: BIRTH BY SLEEP

Have keyblade, will travel

PSP **PRICE:** $39.99 **ESRB:** Everyone 10+ **PUBLISHER:** Square Enix **DEVELOPER:** Square Enix

Has it really been half a decade since PlayStation saw an original *Kingdom Hearts?* Yet even as our hopes of a full-fledged PS3 sequel get dimmer with every passing year, King Mickey's realm has never looked better than in the PSP's *Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep*. And that's no small-screen delusion. Not only are the recognizable characters far more comically expressive, but the environments new and old have never been closer to their cartoon counterparts.

Yes, even the princess levels keep in thematic "toon" with their inspiration in a way only *Kingdom Hearts II's Tron* level had done. Angular trees and sloping cliffs in Sleeping Beauty's enchanted dominion are immediately distinguishable from the brightly flowered meadows of Snow White's dwarf woodlands. Even the smaller details, such as a newly created Indian village, did a brilliant job of convincing us we'd never truly been to Neverland before. It doesn't necessarily take an animation nerd to appreciate it, yet it has vastly improved the unenviable task of adapting almost a century's worth of Walt's legacy into the framework of a *Final Fantasy* role-playing game. After all, this is most certainly a Disney game.

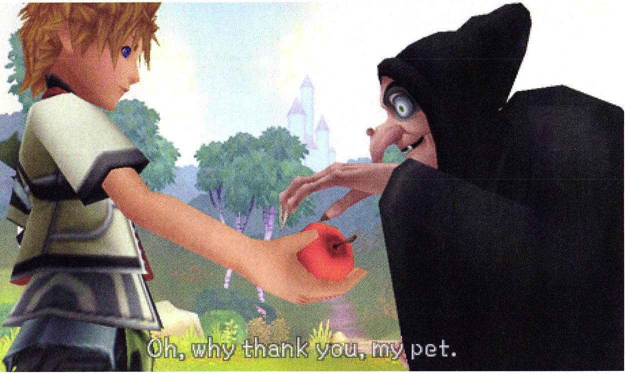
Triple Threat

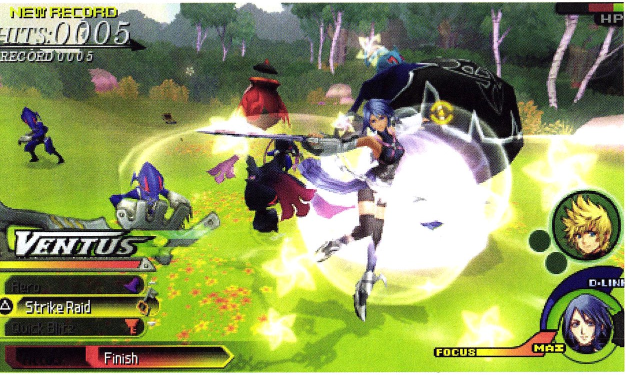
The story so far? It doesn't matter. While hardcore fans will delight at having light shed on gaps in the story, newcomers needn't shy away for fear of being left in the darkness. *Sleep* is set years before the events of the PS2 games and stars the mysterious trio of keybladers glimpsed at the end of *Hearts II*. Best of all, instead of selecting a class at the beginning of the game, we get to play as all three: Terra, the hotheaded powerhouse; Ventus, the Roxas doppelganger; and the vixenly Aqua. All have their own skill sets, objectives, and a 15-plus hour story arc. We encountered different Disney characters and scenarios with all three of the characters, some of which were a lot darker than we expected. But the biggest incentive to complete all three stories is because that's the only way to unlock the *playable* secret ending.

While there are no summons this time around, the D-Link system more than makes up for this by allowing the characters to access another's

➘ Kingdom Hearts Multiplayer?

Yep. Six players can suit up over ad-hoc in the Mirage Arena to compete in head-to-head versus battles, survival objectives, and even kart-racing mini-games to unlock in-game rewards.


Oh, why thank you, my pet.



↑ Who needs Final Fantasy?

In *Kingdom Hearts* games, we mean! Square's iconic characters take an even more diminished role in *Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep,* with only a *single Final Fantasy* speaking role (HINT: He's from *Final Fantasy VII.)* Yes, originally the *FF* characters were a huge draw, helping the *Kingdom Hearts* series sell 12 million copies worldwide. However, we're not exactly boo-hooing their omission. Of course we initially enjoyed fighting alongside Auron and chatting up a resurrected Aerith. Yet, their legacies (understandably) take a backseat to a larger, unexplored Disney universe—which essentially reduces the presence of *FF* characters to meaningless cameos. After all, Squall shouldn't have to mind the store; Donald Duck's got his nephews for that.

> “A glorious reminder of what occurs when the grandeur of Disney melds with the talents of an A-list developer.”

powers. A quick tap of the D-pad provides instantaneous access to not only the abilities of all three protagonists, but also several iconic characters encountered throughout the game.

Command and Conquer

Disney dorkouts aside, non-RPG fans should know that not only is *Sleep* one of the most action-oriented *Hearts* titles to date, but it also sports one of the deepest, most rewarding combat systems available on PSP. Along with copious combos, we let loose with elemental magic, special abilities, and devastating barrages of lock-ons, all in real time. The sheer variety of battle combinations and unlockable skills available in the command deck are absolutely staggering—and all these abilities can be switched out, leveled up, and melded together to increase in power. And with ample time provided to try them all—and no wrong way to grow—taking the time to explore the seemingly infinite number of battle combinations makes for one of the most addictive and hardcore portable experiences we've ever played. The beautifully creative boss fights crank up the challenge, giving us an enormous sense of accomplishment that comes from knowing when to time guards and unleash attacks with an almost *Street Fighter* precision.

As enjoyable as *Sleep* is, it still feels a bit dated. The camera system retains last-gen suckage making lock-ons occasionally unclear, and the rare instances of platforming are an outright pain. The pacing can be a drag too: enter world, enter small area, cutscene, combat, cutscene, move to next area. Now imagine each comma in that sentence representing 30 seconds to a full minute of waiting. Anything other than a *full* install of the game on a PSP results in some of the most persistent and lengthy load times we've ever witnessed. Menus, save points, and even chargeable moves require…loading…while playing off the UMD. It's agonizing, to say the least, and even more untolerable when gaming on the go.

Other than these significant technical drawbacks, it's hard to fault a game celebrating several decades worth of history for sticking closely to its roots. *Sleep* remains a glorious reminder of what occurs when the grandeur of the Disney legacy melds with the talents of an A-list game developer. Now, if Square Enix could just get around to announcing *Kingdom Hearts III…* | Chris Antista

Rating ★★★★☆

KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

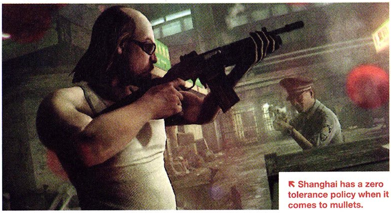
The relentless pursuit of gratuitous violence

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** Square Enix **DEVELOPER:** Io Interactive

There will be people who enjoy *Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days.* They are the same people who watch car races for the crashes, enjoy slo-mo replays of limbs snapping during NFL games, and think *Friday the 13th* movies have too much story.

Don't get us wrong, we're not condemning *Dog Days* for its unyeilding brutality. Gratuitous violence is a gaming mainstay, after all, and when prepared properly has the irresistible allure of junk food after midnight. What we're complaining about is how *Dog Days* manages to make excess seem so mundane.

It starts out promising enough: while far from



↖ **Shanghai has a zero tolerance policy when it comes to mullets.**

↖ **Got psycho friends? *Dog Days* is at its best in co-op or multiplayer.**

> “We wanted to know more about the duo and the Shanghai criminal underworld. But any semblance of depth was executed as soon as we pulled the trigger.”

reformed, psychotic murderers Kane and Lynch have developed interests beyond rampant killing sprees. Lynch has a girlfriend and Kane wants to reconcile with his estranged daughter, and they've come together for one last money-making criminal enterprise.

This hint of emotional complexity coupled with the game's distinctive handheld video-cam look had us hooked early: We wanted to know more about the duo and the fascinating Shanghai criminal underworld they were embroiled in. But any semblance of depth was executed as soon as we pulled the trigger.

Off the Mark

Dog Days' gameplay is relentlessly centered on blasting through Shanghai's streets, alleyways, and buildings against seemingly endless waves of gangsters, law enforcement, and soldiers. While the city is recreated in appearance, it's no sandbox environment. The required path through levels is often corridor-like in its restrictiveness, and there's no incentive or reward to explore the limited environments.

The cover system works well enough, and employing flanking maneuvers with the AI or a co-op partner is the most effective way to clear an area, but the only distinctive gamplay element is the ability to use a person as a human shield (with the option to release or execute). But the human shield-feature inexplicably comes at the cost of a melee attack capability, so killing an immediately adjacent enemy requires backing away, lining up the crosshairs, and shooting them. Weak.

Weapons are numerous and range from shotguns on one end of the spectrum to sniper rifles on the other—none of which feel particularly impactful. Some weapons make it easier to dispense certain enemies in particular portions of the game, but most any weapon can be used to progress if the player follows one mantra: keep firing. In short, *Dog Days* amounts to two guys, two guns, and too much repetitive shooting.

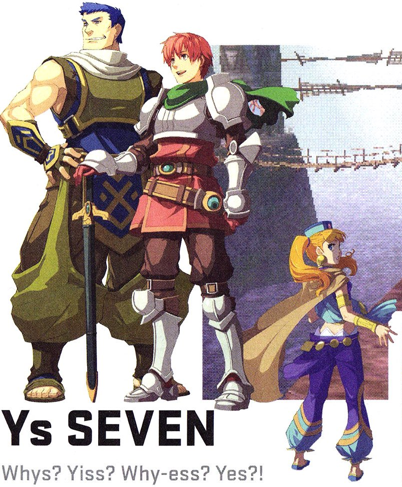
Shock Value

Dog Days main attention-keeping ploy is its graphic between-level cutscenes. The clips often feature nudity or copious amounts of blood, but truly graphic sequences are pixilated out as a video-cam artifact. It's odd that a mature-rated game that's seemingly intent on notoriety should employ such self-censorship. One particular torture scene wasn't memorable for the actual act (which wasn't shown), but rather for what was apparently deemed acceptable to show: gaping cut wounds and Kane and Lynch's bare asses.

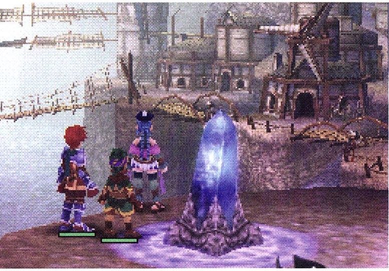
But perhaps *Dog Days'* most shocking attribute is just how little game there actually is. The Story mode has 10 levels that take no more than 30 minutes each to complete, resulting in a five-hour experience.

In hindsight, *Dog Days'* brevity may be its greatest attribute, as the story is a series of unsatisfying plot resolutions topped off by a ridiculously abrupt and unimaginative ending. Yes, it's the one shooter where you're actually thankful when you finally run out of bullets. | Roger Burchill

Rating ★★⯪☆☆



↓ Two's company and three's an adult movie. Or in this case, a bigger party than *Ys* has ever had before.



Ys SEVEN

Whys? Yiss? Why-ess? Yes?!

PSP **PRICE:** $29.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** XSEED Games **DEVELOPER:** Nihon Falcom

For the record, it's pronounced like "fleece," minus the first two letters. Of course, those of us who knew that are already drooling for *Ys Seven,* the first entry in the long-running action role-playing game series since 2006. Fair warning: It's quite different from its predecessors, but its changes refresh the venerable franchise. And fortunately, not a lick of knowledge about it is needed to enjoy *Seven.*

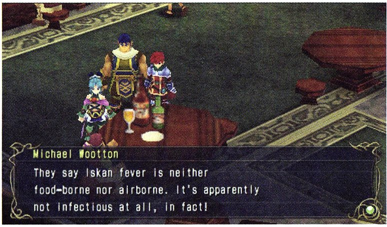
As always, fire-haired hero Adol Christin and blue-maned sidekick Dogi sail the globe and manage to find trouble. In *Seven,* the setting is the kingdom of Altago, whose lands are under siege from the Titanos—gigantic boss creatures bent on destruction. In the past, hero duty would've fallen squarely on Adol's shoulders, but *Seven* introduces a party system. Adol's always got two other allies with him, each lending his unique talents to the real-time battles making up the meat of *Ys.* Though we only control one character, we can cycle through the crew at any time by pressing Circle, leaving the artificial intelligence to drive Adol and our third friend. It's reminiscent of *Secret of Mana,* and it works swimmingly here, adding variety and additional character investment to the experience.

Seven is also the biggest *Ys* yet. It spans an entire continent, giving us plenty to do and lots of locales to adventure in. It's also much longer than the franchise's usual 8- to 12-hour romp. Oh, and the legendary *Ys* soundtrack? It's up to the series' usual high standards.

While it's sometimes difficult to figure out where to go, our only major beef with *Seven* is how drawn-out the frequent tumbles with the Titanos are. Even when their attack patterns become obvious, it still takes a solid 10 minutes or more to drop one of them. Finally, we're a bit miffed that *Seven* lacks voice acting, particularly when 1989's *Ys: Book I & II* for the Turbo-Grafx CD-ROM had it.

Still, this is a heaping, delicious serving of an action-RPG meal with a recipe that's new and improved enough to keep even prior noshers coming back for seconds. | Shane Zachary

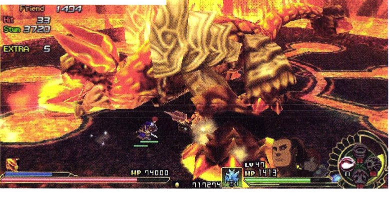
Rating ★★★★☆

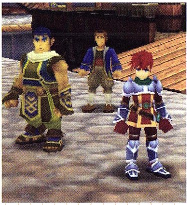


Michael Wootton

They say Iskan fever is neither food-borne nor airborne. It's apparently not infectious at all, in fact!

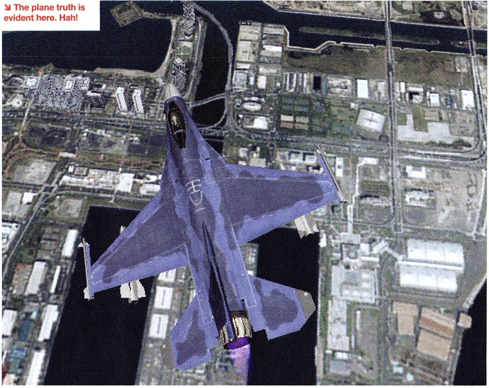
↘ Wherever red-haired hero Adol Christin and loyal sidekick Dogi go, monsters seem to follow.



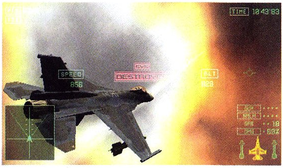


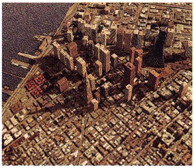
↑ Still Mana's Secret

Ys Seven's three-person party system combined with its real-time hack-and-slash combat reminds us a lot of the Super Nintendo fave, *Secret of Mana.* Part of what made that 15-plus-year-old title so memorable was its three-player cooperative mode. It is somewhat ironic and completely disappointing that *Ys Seven*—a 21st century game built on 21st century technology—lacks any sort of ad-hoc or infrastructure multiplayer mode that could've given us cooperative action role-playing game delights not seen since *Mana.* Sigh…



↘ The plane truth is evident here. Hah!





↑ Take the highway that leads directly to the danger zone.

ACE COMBAT: JOINT ASSAULT

Locked on target

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Project Aces

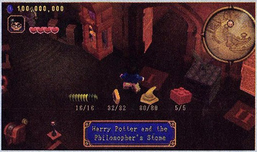
In a world that's constantly at war, the trend towards fictional war games seems an oddity. But the appeal of defending real-world locations like Japan, Midway, and San Francisco in *Ace Combat: Joint Assault* makes it oddly compelling. The idea that massive dogfights can break out at any time is spectacular enough, but for the taut, straightforward action to take place in the skies above our native Bay Area makes the combat seem more dangerous, more immediate.

Yet the real-world locales haven't forced developer Project Aces into making the game *too* real. Even during its early stages, the game offers science fiction touches such as a giant air fortress with a devastating (yet slowly recharging) laser cannon. Battles get bigger and more difficult as *Assault* progresses, but the game's HUD design and camera angles made it easy to keep track of even the largest campaigns.

Even though the idea of most flight combat games is to be the ultimate hero, *Assault* isn't entirely dependent on that concept. Teamwork is necessary to take out bigger threats, although a well-designed control scheme helps make taking on such challenges easier.

Small issues do exist, such as the goofy storyline and a not-so-useful copilot, but *Assault* makes an admirable outing for anyone who's ever sought to become *Top Gun's* Maverick. | Tony Barrett

Rating ★★★★☆



↑ Mr. Potter is the original blockhead, says Severus Snape.

LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1-4

Reducio gameplay!

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Warner Bros. Interactive Ent. DEVELOPER: Traveller's Tales

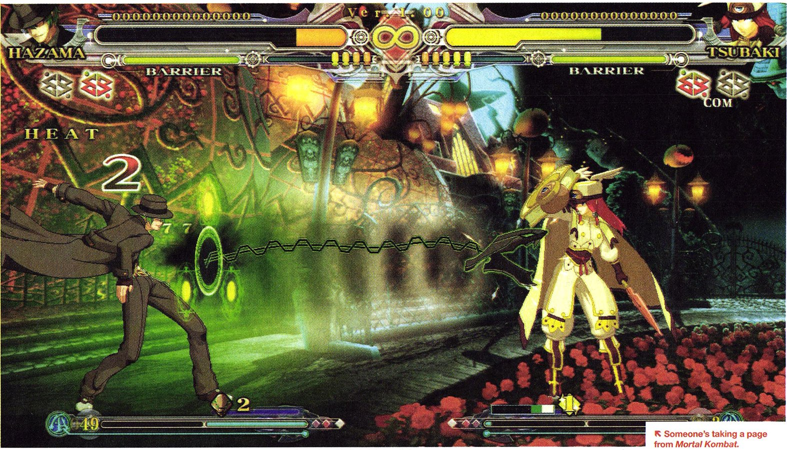
The PSP *LEGO Harry Potter* offers little mystery: It's a magical and humorous take on the familiar story with some new puzzles and challenges. Not all elements are unlocked on first play so be sure to note the unique capabilities of characters and spells to completely explore the game. A relaxed difficulty makes the extra effort easier to take.

But some puzzles don't make much sense. The initial transfiguration lesson, for instance, has LEGO blocks float outside a playing field; there are dark and light blocks on the field and on the pieces, so the inclination is to match them. Instead, the solution is to fill in the darkened area of the field.

The portable *Potter* has the ingredients of a decent game, but lacks the inspiration and polish needed to conjure a potent gameplay potion. | Tony Barrett

Rating ★★★☆☆

↑ It's magic made tiny with Harry Potter on the PSP.



↖ Someone's taking a page from *Mortal Kombat.*

BLAZBLUE: CONTINUUM SHIFT

More of the same, but in a good way

PS3 **PRICE:** $39.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Aksys Games **DEVELOPER:** Arc System Works

Sitting somewhere between a sequel and a revamp, *BlazBlue: Continuum Shift* is unquestionably a great 2D fighter, but then so is the game it retools, *BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger*. *Shift* adds new characters, but only four—one of which is a palette-swapped clone of *Trigger's* boss, and another requiring a serious time investment to unlock. And, blasphemy of blasphemies, it adds a beginner mode enabling casual players to execute badass combos and special moves simply by buttonmashing.

However, all that doesn't change one important fact: *Shift* is incredibly fun, with rapid, over-the-top action that's accessible to casual players and still ridiculously deep for the ultra-hardcore. And *Shift* is the best *BlazBlue* available, with noticeably sharper sprites, tweaked characters, more to do than its predecessor, and an inviting $40 price tag.

TSUBAKI
LITCHI
BARRIER
BARRIER
COM
HEAT
4

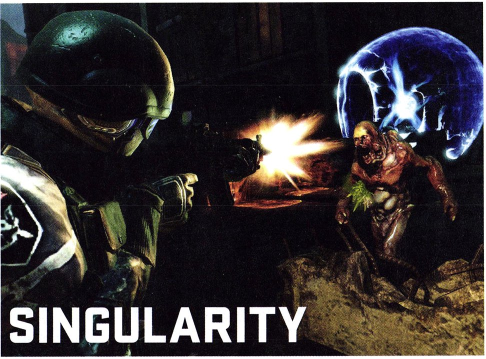
↖ Team Edward versus Team Jacob? We all lose that fight.

All of the game's fighters are unique, with each using a specific fighting style or gimmick (for example, a six-foot marionette that moves and attacks independently of its master, or a teleporting, shape-shifting blob), and in this regard the new faces don't disappoint. Most notable are Hazama, the rail-thin (but slow) villain who attacks with a weird magical chain; and Tsubaki, a valkyrie-like, three-eyed Librarium officer who specializes in rapid close-quarters attacks.

A revamped story mode expounds upon *BlazBlue's* absurdly dense backstory with branching narratives for all 14 central characters. Picking up where *Trigger* left off, these new stories do a much better job of explaining the game's world, but be warned: They're *extremely* chatty, with lengthy, mostly static cutscenes filled with annoyingly chirpy voice acting for some characters.

Shift also brings some new modes to the party, including Legion, a conquest-style board game returning from the PSP version of *Trigger,* and a detailed tutorial to carefully walk players through the rapid cancels, guard crushes, and the other semi-hidden techniques that make *BlazBlue: Continuum Shift* such a deceptively deep game. Roll in the promise of more new characters via downloadable content and *Shift* is definitely worth snapping up, especially for those who loved *Trigger*—or never got around to playing it at all. | Mikel Reparaz

Rating ★★★★☆



↑ The time manipulation elements are too limited to raise the game beyond standard shooter fare.

SINGULARITY

Not exactly timeless

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** Activision
DEVELOPER: Raven Software

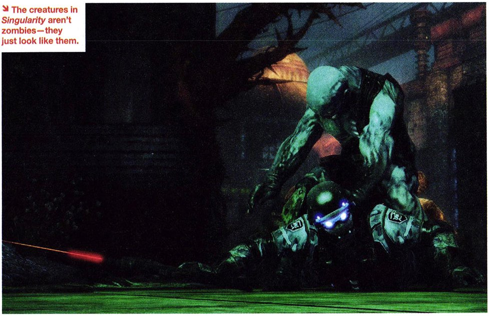
Ever wonder what would happen if *Back to the Future's* Dr. Emmett Brown had worked for Joseph Stalin? Well, *Singularity* offers a way to find out with a trip back to 1955 through the lens of post-war Soviet research.

Singularity is of two minds on the matter of its presentation and play. Its potential graphical splendor alternates between gorgeous and (oddly) substandard, with some scenes being impressively detailed (the aging and de-aging properties of the hero's Time Manipulation Device) and others (enemies and non-player character models) looking incomplete. The storyline moves quickly and contains enough hooks to keep players progressing, but owes more than a few nods to (and ends up feeling like a lesser hybrid of) *BioShock* and *Half-Life 2.*

All of the expected firearms are present as well, including pistols, shotguns, sniper rifles, and even a delayed-explosion rail gun. Some weapons offer play-slowing bullet time-like features, and others even sport the ability to steer a fired round after it leaves the weapon. The aiming feels off at times but assistance is selectable from the options menu.

At best, *Singularity* offers a fine and occasionally remarkable campaign full of governmental conspiracy and time travel, plus a robust multiplayer mode. Conversely, it's also a run-of-the-mill shooter with a power glove time-altering gimmick to add wow factor. While not exactly a title for the permanent collection, *Singularity* does deliver its fair share of fast-paced action and time-altering thrills. | Russell Garbutt

Rating ★★★☆☆



↘ The creatures in *Singularity* aren't zombies—they just look like them.

↑ If the game didn't specifically require us to kill our enemies, we could usually just walk right past them.

CLASH OF THE TITANS: THE VIDEOGAME

The gods must be lazy

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** Namco Bandai
DEVELOPER: Game Republic

Well, it's not broken: That's about the only positive thing we can say about *Clash of the Titans.* It didn't crash, the controls usually cooperated, and the camera, though troublesome, never left us feeling frustrated. But beyond its technical adequacy, *Titans* is an embarrassing mess.

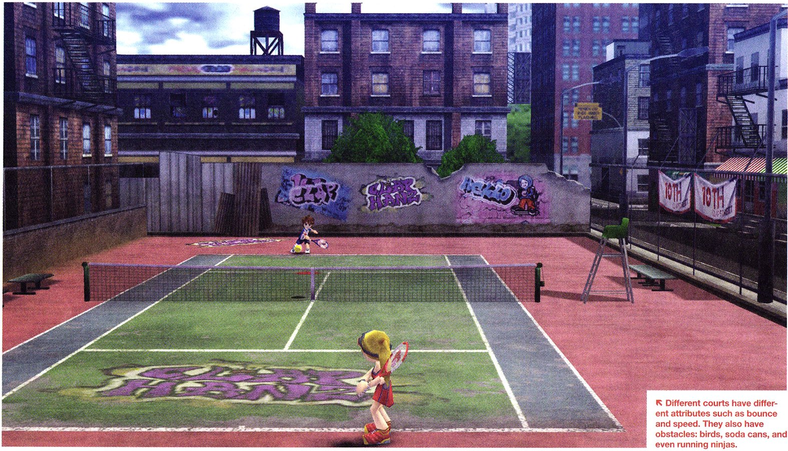
The narrative mirrors the game's mediocre popcorn-flick namesake closely enough to remain coherent, but the cutscenes are absolutely ridiculous. Out-of-sync mouthing, jarring pauses between speakers, voice acting bordering on laughable—it's like a poorly dubbed kung fu film.

The gameplay redeems nothing. *Titans* shamelessly reuses environments mission after unimaginative mission, returning us to the exact same tiny, enclosed areas to face boring, braindead enemies that take far too long to kill. The amount of repetition is both astounding and absurd.

Clash of the Titans is the worst kind of bad: ill-conceived, poorly executed, and depressingly uninventive. | Scott Butterworth

Rating ★☆☆☆☆

↑ Good rule of thumb: If a game's title ends in "The Videogame," don't expect a life-changing experience.



↖ Different courts have different attributes such as bounce and speed. They also have obstacles: birds, soda cans, and even running ninjas.

HOT SHOTS TENNIS: GET A GRIP

Not just cute—cutthroat

PSP PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Clap Hanz

In *Hot Shots Tennis: Get a Grip,* the opponents are clever. They force us to learn the game the *hard* way—as in, by watching a 12-year-old island princess giggle condescendingly as we miss *another* one of her smashes. But in those sweet, sweet moments when we finally lob a ball over her smirking head to win the match, we feel like we've discovered a new strategy. And that's exactly the kind of engagement we want in our sports games.

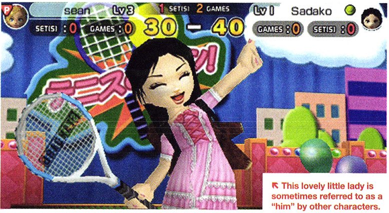
There are technically only a few moves in *Grip:* tap X for spins, Circle for slices, and Triangle for lobs, and tack on a direction with the analog nub while pressing a face button to nudge the ball in the right direction. But it's all about context. Perform a spin when the ball is high in the air, and it becomes a jump hit. Press down on the analog nub while slicing, and it becomes a drop shot.

The more we played the game, the more intricacies we uncovered. Everything matters: timing, positioning, footwork, a court's bounciness, our character's favored play style (baseline, net, or all-around), our opponent's favored style, and even what clothes are worn. Taking all that into consideration to develop effective strategies is what makes the matches so satisfying.

The role-playing game elements are even more rewarding. Victories grant equippable items (which give stat bonuses and are mad fun to collect) and loyalty points (upping a loyalty level also grants bonuses). Compulsively searching maps for secret gear stashes is fun (a quick peek in someone's drawers netted us a maid costume), but the story's premise is weak (travel the world to spread the tennis joy, whoop-de-do).

We have a few quibbles, like nonplayer characters addressing our character by the wrong gender and the very oddly placed line breaks in text, but the tennis was enjoyable. And whenever anything especially annoyed, we just remembered: There's no thrill of victory without some agony of defeat. | Jack Bennett

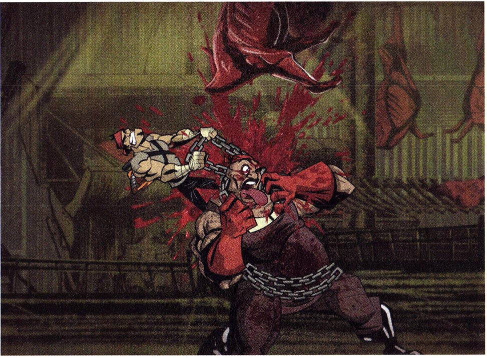
Rating ★★★★☆



↖ This lovely little lady is sometimes referred to as a "him" by other characters.

↑ Tennis Irony

A game where the premise is to travel the globe spreading the love of tennis...limits the multiplayer experience to whoever happens to be sitting next to you? *Hot Shots Tennis: Get a Grip* doesn't support wireless multiplayer. How can we spread the love of tennis if we can't even play with the rest of the world?



↑ How do you butcher the butcher? With his own stinking chain, that's how. Victory tastes like aged steak.

SHANK

Pulp gaming

PSN **PRICE:** $14.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Klei Entertainment

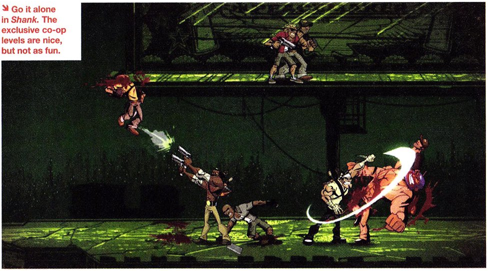
There's comedy in brutality, and nowhere is that more apparent than when we took our revenge on the butcher. We were wronged, and we needed to set things right by stabbing, shooting, chainsawing, and generally brutalizing anyone standing in our way. After dispatching wave after wave of thugs, grunts, and mercenaries, we ran into our initial object of disgust about a third of the way through this six-hour jaunt, and in a heated encounter, we finished him off in a manner that can only be described as "ironic." (Who butchers the butcher? Shank does!)

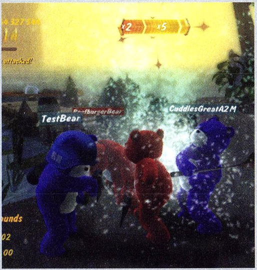
It's a joyful experience, *Shank* is—an homage to old-school side-scrolling beat-'em-ups, along with a playful tribute to indie comics, all delivered with far more blood than necessary. The violence is free-flowing, as are the combos, with attacks that combine in ways that probably make perfect sense within Shank's rage-addled brain. A stabbing uppercut can lead into a pistol juggle, followed by a wallop with dual machetes, finished by a leaping grapple transitioning into a deadly chokeout with chain-fists. Part of the fun here is fiddling with the limited but varied weaponry and seeing all the creative ways we can kill off our foes; the rest comes from simply mashing away on the buttons and marveling at the mayhem on screen.

Yes, the handful of bosses are basic pattern-based affairs, and it's a challenge to switch to the desired weapon when caught up in a scrum—but *Shank* proves once again that there are lessons to be learned from the old-school, and that dressing up classic gameplay with gorgeous graphics is sometimes enough. | Gary Steinman

Rating ★★★★☆

↘ Go it alone in *Shank*. The exclusive co-op levels are nice, but not as fun.





↑ In which Pooh decides naughtiness is simply not nice and instead goes on a picnic with Eeyore, Piglet, and much, much hunny.

Naughty Bear

Naughty by nature, bad by design

PS3 **PRICE:** $49.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** 505 Games
DEVELOPER: Artificial Mind and Movement

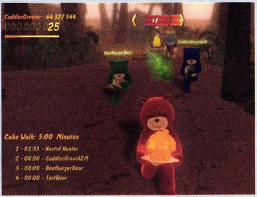
The teddy bear picnic, sadly, ends horribly.

Naughty Bear's Perfection Island is inhabited by dozens of friendly, joyous teddy bears, and one grungy, homicidal bear. As Naughty, players earn points by sabotaging the bears' village, driving them to insanity, and murdering them. It's essentially *Manhunt* with bad stitching.

But controlling Naughty is a constant pain because there is no programmed dead-zone for the analog stick, thus Naughty constantly wanders off in unintended directions during maneuvers and kills. The wooded terrain conceals the psychotic bear from his brethren, but a shoddy camera system ensures there's always something blocking our view as well. Add in jarring camera movements and the low framerate and we were experiencing headaches in record time.

Worst of all, any "fun" inherent in teddy bear-offing only lasts as long as it takes to commit every heinous act in the game: about an hour-and-a-half. | David Murphy

Rating ★⯪☆☆☆


CuddlesGreater - 64 327 544
25
x1
Cake Walk: 5:00 Minutes
1 - 01:35 - Nostril Hunter
2 - 00:00 - CuddlesGreatA2M
3 - 00:00 - BeefburgerBear
4 - 00:00 - TestBear

↑ *Naughty Bear* is as crummy as a stale cupcake.

↖ The gameplay experience lives up to *NCAA Football's* pomp and circumstance.

NCAA FOOTBALL 11

ESPN NCAA BFF FTW

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Tiburon

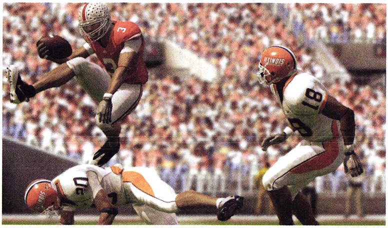
We hate two things about college football. First, the marching bands. Second, Tim Tebow. *NCAA Football 11* uses both—the latter on the box cover and the loading screen. This makes us sad. Still, amid an overdose of pomp and ceremonial broadcast presentation, this simulation provides great football action and enough dream material to give high school kids goose bumps. Plus it has Erin Andrews. But she's a different kind of dream material.

The high-school playoffs in Road to Glory mode made created players feel like they were juiced, but playing through these games sets up what becomes the core of the NCAA experience: earning the university offer and following it up with performance on the collegiate field. Once in school, life is clearly designed around "ideal" circumstances—no questionable parties or NCAA sanctions. The path to amateur glory is instead littered with targets to attain. As the named guy, performance at virtually any position shaped the outcome of each game, and provided a different feeling—in many ways more compelling—than *Madden's* star-strewn process.

On the field, the dual-stick motion makes dekes and jukes flash by with more fluidity than before. That right-stick flick to make a dodge is so crucial we wonder how it took EA Tiburon so long to get it, ahem, in the game. The Dynasty mode is a great shout-out to committed fans of a particular school, and working the recruiting system illustrates how complex the NCAA's rules really are.

Taking a created alter-ego all the way through a career that could be imported into the pros? Yeah, we're trying that for the long haul. With 120 schools and a vast amount of ESPN branding (ESPNU150; ESPN Instant Classics for a last-play score for a win, for example; ESPN On Demand; and more), plus a tighter on-field experience, this is a great package of college football fan service, despite the irritating presence of its cover "star." | Alex Clark

Rating ★★★★⯪



HEAD-Y, SET, GO!

We break down the best PlayStation-compatible headsets

NOX Specialist

$79.95 | NOX Audio | www.nox-audio.com

Rating ★★★☆☆

Design is the Specialist's speciality. It's small and foldable, comes in an assortment of colors, and we love the twist knobs on the earpieces for volume control and deploying the retractable mic. Unfortunately, our enthusiam is diminished by the average-at-best sound quality and construction that feels a bit on the flimsy side.

METAL GEAR SOLID
PEACE WALKER

PlayStation The Official Magazine
★★★★★
Editors' Choice

Astro A30
MGS: Peace Walker edition

$149.95 | Astro Gaming | www.astrogaming.com

Rating ★★★★★

The A30's versatility makes it PTOM's everyday headset of choice. We love the *MGS* fan service, but appreciate that the speaker tags can be swapped out when we want to downplay our geekdom. It's also compact enough for on-the-go PSP use, but combine it with Astro's MixAmp ($129.95) for 5.1 Dolby sound support and integrated voice communication on the PS3. Sure it's pricey, but this is the one headset that does everything "just right."

EAR FORCE PX21
EAR FORCE PX21

Ear Force PX21

$79.95 | Turtle Beach | www.turtlebeach.com

Rating ★★★½☆

The PX21 fulfills the audio requirements of most gamers and its low price makes it the value-friendly pick. The in-line control box, the generous 16-foot cable, and flexible mic boom are all nice touches. The only real downsides are the lack of surround sound capability and its wire-happy connection requirements.

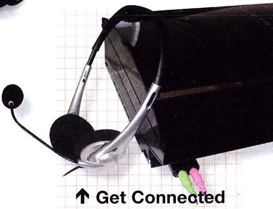
Sharkoon
X-TATIC

X-Tatic Digital

$159.99 | Sharkoon | www.sharkoon.com

Rating ★★★★☆

With a total of eight speakers (four for each ear) and 5.1 Dolby surround sound support, the X-Tatic Digital may have the best audio quality of this bunch. But its heavy weight and the mass of connection wires running between the headset, its sound control unit (included), and the PS3 make it a strictly home-gaming affair.



↑ Get Connected

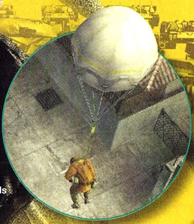
If a gaming-specific headset is a luxury that can't be afforded in this economy, consider the Headset Buddy system. For $39.95, it provides the adapter and cables neccessary to connect a PC headset to the PS3. Available at theheadsetbuddy.com.

10 reasons why Peace Walker is the Big Boss of PSP gaming

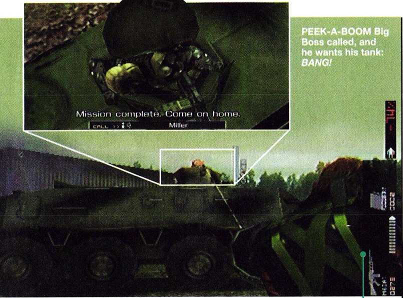
by Rich Stanton

1 THE INCREDIBLE FLYING FULTON MACHINE

Perhaps the best idea in *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker,* the glue holding it all together from first till last, is capturing enemy soldiers with a comedy balloon. In *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops* it was possible to kidnap baddies, but it was a literal drag. Here, just knock them out (or leave them near death) and fiddle with their belt. Whoosh: they're off, and either immediately incorporated into Mother Base's staff and waiting to be assigned a role, or stuck in the brig until they see sense and line up. The elaborate weapons are wonderful bonuses, and it's clear: Enemies are real collectibles.



WHEE-MOTE Big Boss loves sending his friends off with a quick Fulton.



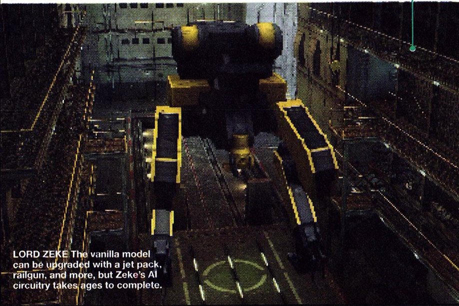
PEEK-A-BOOM Big Boss called, and he wants his tank: *BANG!*

2 COMMANDERS

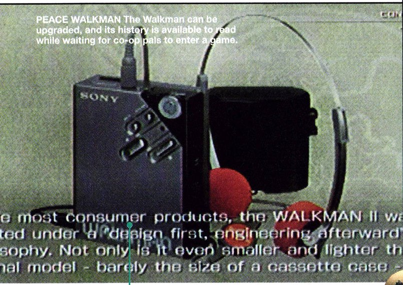
The touch of genius in the mech system: commanders. These change fights between men and machine into cat-and-mouse exchanges of fire, knife-edge guerilla tactics, or all-out automatic rifle war. By taking out all of the soldier units attached to a vehicle, Boss can lure out the mech's commander. At this point, incapacitating or killing him not only wins the battle, it wins that shiny toy for the garage, making the climax of later battles so satisfying.

3 BUILDING ZEKE

Metal Gears are a treat: the terrifying foe at the heart of all *Metal Gear Solid* games. But in *Peace Walker,* players build the thing. Metal Gear Zeke he's called, and after Boss has hoarded enough scrap to get his body built, he can go around the globe to kill evildoers. Zeke feels like a personal creation, from the tip of his weapons-grade nose to his gigantic metal toes, built from collecting bits of enemy AI weapons, pulling out their circuit boards, and then choosing either a dayglo yellow or devilishly black hull. It's a nuclear-capable, all-terrain Tamagotchi!



LORD ZEKE The vanilla model can be upgraded with a jet pack, railgun, and more, but Zeke's AI circuitry takes ages to complete.



PEACE WALKMAN The Walkman can be upgraded, and its history is available to read while waiting for co-op pals to enter a game.

e most consumer products, the WALKMAN II wa
ted under a "design first, engineering afterward"
sophy. Not only is it even smaller and lighter th
nal model - barely the size of a cassette case -

4 DAZZLING DETAIL

One minute *Peace Walker's* menus are windows to the remarkable story of the Sony Walkman unfolding in the R&D department, the next they're a door to briefing files and extra ops. Then there's the short, jam-packed descriptions of military hardware, the individual lines uttered by every soldier, or the way players can send friends a gift and choose the music that plays when it's opened. It's the dazzling and loving detail of the world that makes it extra special.

5 SNAKE IN

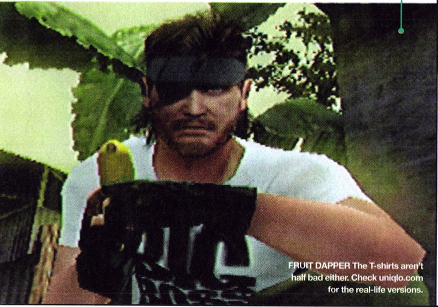
Snake in! Boss can coordinate with an ally in close proximity, allowing him to concentrate on the things that matter: radars, watching for items, or firing into the pursuing crowd while his pointman weaves an escape route. It's also perfect for letting one player take care of the stealth, and the other take care of the more important stuff like visiting the bathroom—a key tactic when involved in long sessions.

TAG TEAM *Peace Walker* masters spend as much time synced as possible to increase camaraderie.

6

USE FRUIT TO THREATEN

Why hold up chumps with a pistol? Boss can make them look like total chimps by using a mere banana. Scientists have to research and develop the tasty tool, but once completed it's an essential prop for a *Metal Gear* gag reel. Its clear status as a snack rather than a threat also lets *Peace Walker,* typically, go the extra mile, with unique extra ops missions themed around the herbaceous plant.



FRUIT DAPPER The T-shirts aren't half bad either. Check uniqlo.com for the real-life versions.

SLAY CHEESE Never, ever forget the camera when playing cooperatively.

7

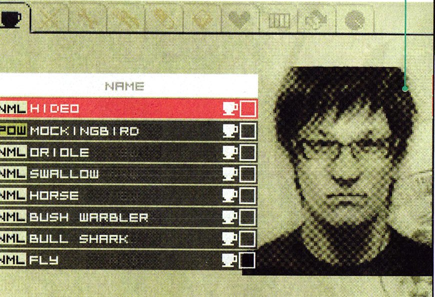
CAPTURING MEMORIES

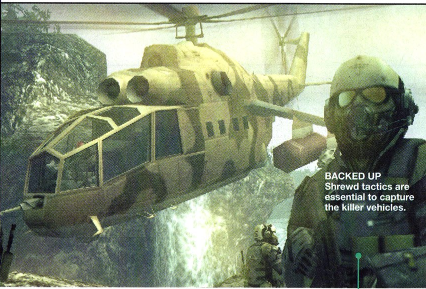
The main tool in *Peace Walker* is its handheld camera, a cool in-game object given new life by cooperative play. With the camera, players will begin to play missions and only care about getting the perfect angle for their partner's daring dive, or making them stand in front of that pretty waterfall—just like a couple on a vacation.

8

HIDEO KOJIMA

A familiar presence in *Metal Gear* games, wily old Kojima takes things one step further in *Peace Walker* by turning up while Boss searches a truck and joining his fledgling army. Not a fighter or a chef, the man modestly gives his virtual self the highest intel stat in the game. Later on, Miller breathlessly declares "Kojima is God!" over and over during a mission briefing. The credits have his name about 20 times. Vanity? Perhaps. But the echoes of Kojima are funny, and give a little showman's dust to the details.





BACKED UP Shrewd tactics are essential to capture the killer vehicles.

9

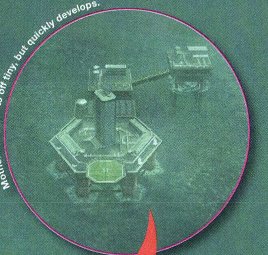
FOUR PLAYER MECH BATTLES

When copying *Monster Hunter,* one thing is key: monsters. *Peace Walker's* behemoths come in the form of military ordnance: APCs, tanks and choppers kitted out in a dizzying array of configurations. As the difficulty ramps up, so does the team's communication. Faced with swarming stormtroopers and explosive barrages, soldiers are forced to coordinate to, finally, hopefully, snipe the commander.

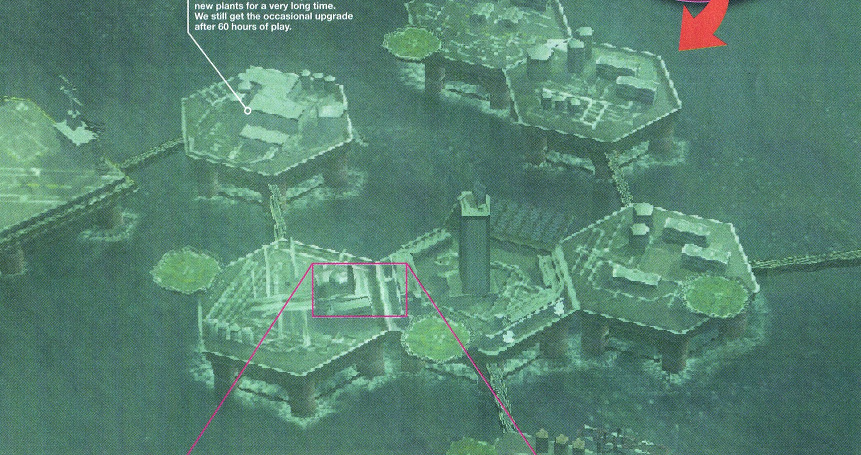
10

MOTHER BASE

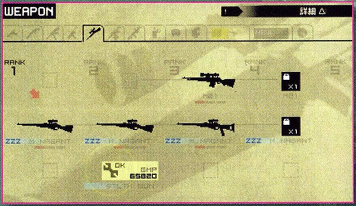
There's no place like home, and there's no home quite like the honeycombed oil rig of Mother Base. Just take a look at our airstrip. Home to an ever-expanding army of mercs, mechs, and scientists, it's where players research awesome new tools, check that everyone's got enough food, and send out ops teams to restore peace. It's a delight just to fiddle with, but the tweaking feeds back into how missions are played—always with one eye open for what's needed back home.



Mother Base starts off tiny, but quickly develops.



TO IKEA! Boss' base expands with new plants for a very long time. We still get the occasional upgrade after 60 hours of play.



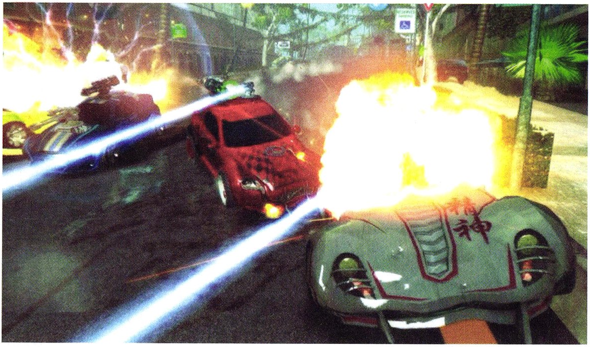
GUN RACK Take shooting to crazy new extremes by modifying existing weaponry.

THE ONES WE DIDN'T PICK...

BATTLE CRIES
It's fairly standard to have a selection of multiplayer shout-outs, but *Peace Walker* has real gems: Soldiers can utter a monster's piercingly loud cry, or boost their teammates' psyche gauge with a few encouraging words.

YOU'RE FIRED!
We're not sure if the impression of Donald Trump is intentional, but Big Boss yelling "You're fired!" at those who don't make the cut is inspired. And the coup de grace is how much fun it is to give some soldiers their walking papers.

PlayStation Network Games



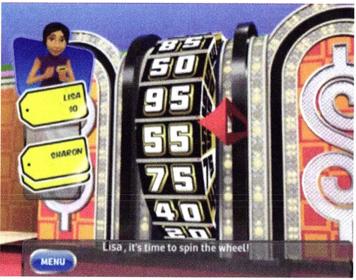
Death Track: Resurrection

PSN PRICE: $14.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Gaijin Entertainment DEVELOPER: Gaijin Entertainment

+ Violence, explosions, and an abundance of vehicular murder are all interesting ways to spruce up the racing genre, and *Death Track: Resurrection* is loaded with all three. For better or worse, this futuristic combat racer puts a solid emphasis on blowing the crap out of opponents with a medley of outrageous weapons. While it doesn't always provide the tightest racing action, zipping full throttle through sprawling cities with live munitions and vehicle parts flying in all directions is quite entertaining.

Cash earned from kicking ass in races is used to upgrade vehicle hardware, such as engines, chassis, and armor. New car models and equipment are unlocked at a steady pace, and three different calibers of weaponry can be hitched onto any rig for maximum killing prowess. The winding tracks are set up in post-apocalyptic renditions of cities around the world and are nicely designed with lots of buildings to destroy and shortcuts to utilize.

Though it's a bit clichéd and oddball, the story-driven campaign mode is beefed up by championship, challenge, and drag races. Local splitscreen multiplayer races are available in addition to the optional online matches. *Track's* graphics are a bit rough around the edges, particularly during cutscenes, but the game does offer its share of amusing, mindless mayhem. | Nathan Meunier



The Price Is Right

PSN PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Ludia DEVELOPER: Ludia

− Warm, fuzzy nostalgia over Bob Barker's classic television game show isn't enough to keep down the indigestion that bubbles up after playing this shoddily crafted take on *The Price Is Right.* Sure, all of the iconic price guessing mini-games are intact, and the familiar jingles and product placements ring true to the original spirit of the show, but hideous character avatars and a slapdash presentation mar the limited gameplay. Ultimately, the show doesn't translate well into videogame format—at least not in this game. | NM

PSone Fun

Long lost classics—now available on PSN

PlayStation
BLOODY ROAR II
TEEN
T
ESRB

Bloody Roar II

PSN/PSP | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: TEEN

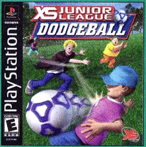
Beating up ripped dudes is way more awesome using nasty fanged animal beasts.

PlayStation
FINAL FANTASY IX
TEEN
T
ESRB
SQUARESOFT

Final Fantasy IX

PSN/PSP | Price: $9.99 | ESRB: Teen

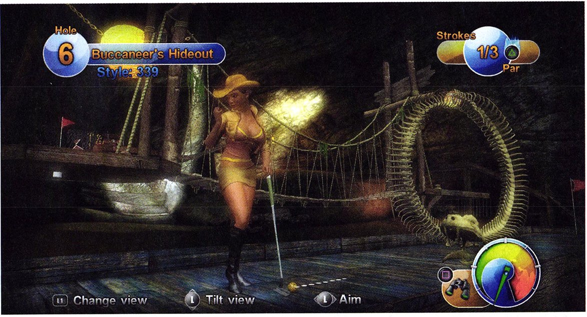
Appropriately epic, the final *Final Fantasy* before sweeping changes visited the series.



XS Junior League Dodgeball

PSN | PRICE: $5.99 | ESRB: Everyone

Who doesn't love smacking bratty kids in the face with balls flung at high speeds?



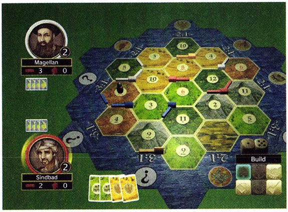
Planet Minigolf

PSN PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Zen Studios DEVELOPER: Zen Studios

+ We have a bit of a soft spot when it comes to putt-putt, and the sheer level of wackiness found in *Planet Minigolf's* zany brand of club swinging and ball whacking warms our hearts. The game's 140-plus holes have multiple tiers of difficulty and are brimming with ramps, shortcuts, and pitfalls to work the ball around. We teed off atop rickety pirate ships on a beach cove, in the seamy streets of London, through ancient Mayan ruins, and on frozen ice caps containing a downed UFO. Each of the dastardly courses is beautifully designed and loaded with nice visual details.

The three very different control schemes are finicky and aren't as precise as they should be, though we acclimated well enough with a little practice. There are five selectable characters including a hulking dude in military garb and a saucy vixen in a cowboy hat and miniskirt, and each can be customized with unlockable outfits and accessories.

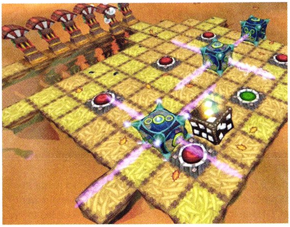
After an initial adjustment period, we found *Minigolf* to be a lot of fun. Like any good minigolf game, the courses are packed with obstacles and opportunities to pull off some sweet trick shots. Conversely, some holes are incredibly tough, and the steep challenge curve does get frustrating on harder stages. But the game's high points outweighed the occasional bouts of grumpy sputtering it produced. | NM



Catan

PSN PRICE: $6.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Game Republic DEVELOPER: Game Republic

+ Game Republic's freshly designed version of the highly addictive strategy board game *Catan* boasts a crisp and stylish presentation. Laying down settlements, gathering resources, and working to outsmart opponents is still as entertaining as ever, and a handful of adjustable game elements let us fine-tune each match to our liking. Also, two additional visual skins are available to switch things up. Online multiplayer matches are solid, but the lack of local multiplayer is a real disappointment. Otherwise, this is one slick game. | NM



Voodoo Dice

PSN PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Exkee

– Rolling a six-sided die through grid-based puzzle levels in *Voodoo Dice* seems a cool idea—at first. In order to navigate our way to the finish line in each stage, we had to clear dice blocks by matching numbers with them adjacently, push totems to hold down triggers, and even connect with magnetic die to increase our size. But *Voodoo Dice's* gameplay grows more unforgiving as additional layers of complexity are added. Getting stuck in some of the more punishing levels is frustrating and quickly kills the fun. | NM

Play On

Must-have add-ons from the PlayStation Store

Fat Princess
Fat Roles DLC

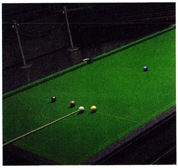
Price: $4.99 | **ESRB:** Mature

Fatten up the princess, don the warrior hats, and take to the battlefield with adorably wicked armies and three killer new character classes—ninjas, pirates, and giants.

MAG
Interdiction Mission Pack

Price: $9.99 | **ESRB:** Teen

The war has expanded greatly with this downloadable content. Confront enemy forces across three new maps and equip soldiers with special armor and gear.



Hustle Kings
Snooker Pack

Price: $2.99 | **ESRB:** Everyone

The king of pool games can now offer the option to play a full game of snooker. The DLC includes additional balls, pools cues, and tournaments to boot.

"A gladiator does not fear death. He embraces it…"

SPARTACUS: BLOOD AND SAND

AVAILABLE: September 21
RATED: TV-MA
GENRE: Action/Drama
STUDIO: Starz Media

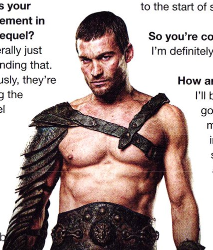
PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month

Gladiators are awesome. So much so that PTOM frequently doffs shirts and pants for thoraxes, pteryges, and gladiuses during particularly pitched deadline battles. We withheld that bit of trivia from Andy Whitfield, star of *Spartacus: Blood and Sand,* lest we creep him out during our chat about his brutally entertaining show.

PTOM: Is *Blood and Sand* a season-specific title?
Andy Whitfield: Yes, the prequel is *Spartacus: Gods of the Arena* and the second season will be *Spartacus: Vengeance.*

What's your involvement in the prequel?
I'm literally just bookending that. Obviously, they're making the prequel because I got sick [Whitfield was diagnosed with early-stage non-Hodgkin lymphoma]. So, I'm going to take it from the end of season one and lead them into the prequel. Then after the prequel, I'll lead them back out to the start of season two.



So you're coming back?
I'm definitely coming back.

How are you feeling?
I'll be good to go in about a month—back in Spartacus shape. I'll go a bit slower because I've got the time. I'll have like three months to get ready instead of one.

How much weight have you gained?
Probably stayed about the same, but the weight went from my love handles to my biceps. Less than 10 percent body fat and then maintaining that for eight months while we shoot was the hardest part really.

Eight months?! We thought digital was supposed to make things easier?
Well, all the digital stuff goes into the backdrop. We're shooting in studio, so if there's a view off a cliff, that's created in the computer.

We're all familiar with the end of Spartacus, so how far off can that be?
Well, in real time it's like 73 B.C. starting season two, and he gets killed in 71 B.C. So there's two years left of his life, but whether that translates to two years on the series, I don't know. But there's plenty of scope left for more seasons.

What's your favorite episode?
I'd say my favorite episode was…episode 10 ["Party Favors"] just because the way the story went was a big moment for Spartacus. It defined the rest of his life, and the things he's going to go on and do. That's my favorite; hope you enjoy that one.

Top VDS Downloads

MOVIES
- *The Bounty Hunter*
- *Hot Tub Time Machine (Unrated)*
- *The Crazies*
- *Cop Out*
- *Our Family Wedding*

TV SHOWS
- *Futurama: Latest Season*
- *The Boondocks: Season 3*
- *Naruto Shippuden Uncut: Season 1, Vol. 4*
- *Family Guy: Season 8*
- *Through the Wormhole with Morgan Freeman: Season 11*

↑ "Oh yeah? See this badge? It says I'm the *King of Sparta.* Whataya think of *that?*"

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
MAGAZINE ISSUE #2

A DARK DAWNING DRAWS NEAR...

Cataclysm

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Letters

PlayStation The Official Magazine
SACK ATTACK!
LittleBigPlanet 2
New friends! Better tools! More fun!
MASSIVE REVEAL! CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS
VOLUME 11! ROCK BAND 3
30 BEST FIREARMS FATSOS AND FEMMES FATALES
REVIEWED! METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER

▲ This month's conversation starter

ANGER MANAGEMENT

I am writing in regards to the anger my fiancé's PS3 games instill in him. I was wondering if there was any chance of reimbursement due to the purchasing of new controllers because it somehow explodes against my wall after being thrown.

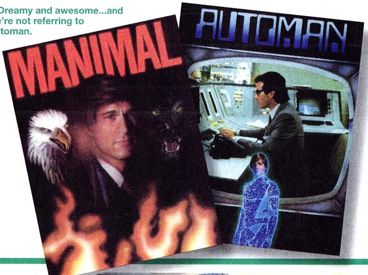
P.S. Any chance for a wall patch, too, and maybe a magic eraser to get the blue out? | *Desiree Bragan, Berkshire County, MA*

Padded walls are a girl's (and an asylum's) best friend, Desiree. And tell your fiancé that we don't throw controllers in this, or any, house—no matter how tough the games are.

MY MAN MANIMAL

Manimal? Really, you had to go there? If you were going to bring up a horrible TV show that might be remotely connected to videogames, why not discuss *Automan?* If you aren't familiar with it, it was a cross between *Tron* and crap. If you need help with any TV or movie references, let me know. I have a whole head full of useless knowledge. | *Josh, Somewhere in Arizona*

There's a reason why the PTOM staff has championed *Manimal* over *Automan*, Josh. It may have something to do with the fact that Automan is 10 pounds of lame in a five-pound sack of lame, whereas *Manimal* is 20 pounds of awesome on a raft adrift in a sea of awesome.



Dreamy and awesome...and we're not referring to Automan.

HIS MOM IS MRS. BUTTERWORTH

Is Scott Butterworth related to Brent Butterworth, former editor in chief of *Home Theater* magazine? | *Lance D., Ocala, FL*

Scott, no relation to Brent, Butterworth brings us love and pancakes. He is the greatest man we will ever know who is also mentioned in this sentence.

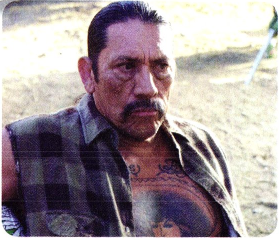
A KEY GAMES JOURNALISM SKILL SET

> "I have a whole head full of useless knowledge."

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I don't know if it's that I'm weird, or if I'm paranoid, but I think that videogame companies in the future are going to go as far as to make videogames so enhanced, that they will grow minds of their own and have the need to eat the whole human race. What do you guys think? | *Daniel Trejo, Parts Unknown*

The tinfoil is normally supposed to go around sandwiches and other assorted leftovers. It might be good, in this case, to use it as headgear to block out the bad thoughts or, you know, *the crazy.* Also, if you are the scary actor Danny Trejo, you win the letter of the month award twice. Just don't hurt us.



We need quarters for the soda machine: Send us every two-bit thought and comment to PTOM_letters@futureus.com

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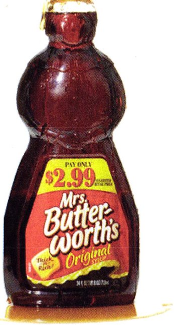


RED DEAD REBUKED

Over the last two years, the PTOM staff requested feedback in conjunction with its reviews. Well, a four-page page review [issue #35] on *Alpha Protocol,* and a single-page review on *Red Dead Redemption?* While Scott Butterworth did a great job with the small review on *Redemption,* there was clearly a ton of meat and potatoes left off the plate!

Thanks for giving *Redemption* a five-star rating, but next time you do that for a game worthy of such prestige, put more eggs in the basket so losers like me can feel like they haven't thrown away two months of their life just to get a *Reader's Digest* version review of a game that clearly deserves more than a single page.

On a side note, I request that no more movie games be reviewed unless they are worth reviewing. *Iron Man 2* on PSP? *Toy Story 3? Shrek Forever After?* I do not know what is sadder: the fact that you guys played these games or the fact that I read the reviews. | *Joshua Bird, Nashville, TN*

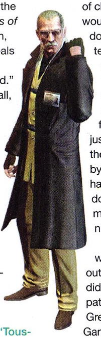
First, Joshua, lose the loser talk. Only losers talk like that. And winners don't need someone else, even someone as awesome as a PTOM staff member, to validate their life choices.

As for the reviews section, well, a lot of factors go into the size and placement of reviews. In this case, we had to review *Red Dead* after the game had already released and sold a zillion copies, so we thought the space would be better devoted to games that still hadn't been released. At other times, we'll give more space to a game that's interesting, even if the final verdict isn't quite stellar. And *Alpha Protocol* is, for all its myriad flaws, interesting.

Oh, and if you miss out on our movie-games review this issue, you will regret it. And a life of regret, as you will know, is for non-winners.

FAKE NAME, SOLIDLY SERIOUS

Please don't talk about the greatest game ever *(Metal Gear Solid),* unless you know what you're talking about. On page 10 of your August issue [issue #35], under the *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* 2014 section, you stated, "Ocelot reveals that he has hypnotized himself to become Liquid." This is not true. First of all, Revolver Ocelot didn't become Liquid, he became Liquid Ocelot. Second of all, and my main point, Liquid Ocelot never revealed about his hypnotism. Big Mama aka Eva revealed to Solid Snake about Ocelot's hypnotism, not Ocelot himself. | *Toussaint Poisson, Parts Unknown*



Scott Butterworth says: Technically, you're absolutely right "Toussaint," and for your vigilance you win...nothing. While it's true that Ocelot becomes "Liquid Ocelot," there's arguably a lot more of the former than the latter floating around in his head, so for clarity's sake, we just went with "Liquid" (hey, we only had 10 words). And even though Eva actually explains the whole hypnotism thing to Snake, we wanted to keep our explanation as clear and concise as possible. Dragging in a spoiler side-character would have simply confused the situation. But thanks for keeping us honest!

ROCKSTAR DEFENSE SQUAD

I have a big problem with the "Has Rockstar gone too far—again?" debate in your August issue [issue #35]. I feel that both sides of the debate completely missed the whole point of Rockstar's "offensive" material. I'm only 25, yet I've met characters from all walks of life: racists, anti-Semites, drug dealers, criminals, prostitutes, etc. Though I may not agree with any of these peoples' lifestyle choices, they are in fact a part of life. If Rockstar did not put these kinds of characters in their games, the world would be too fake and unrealistic. I don't want a game full of cookie cutter "normals" blanding up the game for me. Adding these backwards "offensive" peoples adds character depth and personality to the world that is completely necessary for true immersion. If people would just grow the hell up and just enjoy the game instead of being offended by the material, we could all be happy. The game is a story—people don't get offended by the same material in books or movies near as much.

Personally I don't want a game without character. If I did, I'd be waiting patiently for The Greg Orlando Game—mmm mmm, bland and boring. | *Andrew Stroup, Warren, PA*

But the Greg Orlando game has lasers, sassy robots, and cars that drive you! Also, if players do really well, their hero gets a new hat.

Takin' It to the Tweets

Dying to know what the *PTOM* staff's thinking at any given moment? Follow us: We might even say something interesting.

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

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Et Cetera All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

StarCraft II
PC/Mac | $59.99

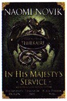
STARCRAFT
WINGS OF LIBERTY

Do not mourn for Greg Orlando. He is in a better place, his mind and body having been carried away by the epic game *StarCraft II.* Sure, he comes in to work, but only if there are paychecks or free bagels.

Phineas and Ferb
TV show | Disney XD

Roger's got a serious case of Evil Love for *Phineas and Ferb.* Creative storylines, clever writing, and a rocking soundtrack back the duo's daily quest for interesting summer vacation projects. But it's the struggle between their pet platypus, Perry (aka Agent P), and the ineptly evil Dr. Heinz Doofenshmirtz that steals the show.

In His Majesty's Service
Book | $28



There be dragons here, and perhaps that would've been enough to please Gary. But having those dragons play a part in Napoleonic-era warfare, with gobs of historically accurate details about military maneuvers? Awesome. (Big thanks to twitter pal @drripark for suggesting this book.)

Scott Pilgrim's Finest Hour
Graphic Novel | $12

SCOTT PILGRIM'S
FINEST HOUR
6

The series has finally come to an end, and frankly, Scott (ours, not Pilgrim) isn't sure what to think. Metaphysical fight scenes? Awkward makeout sessions? It's madness! Regardless, the *Scott Pilgrim* series as a whole remains a must-read for every gamer with a pulse.

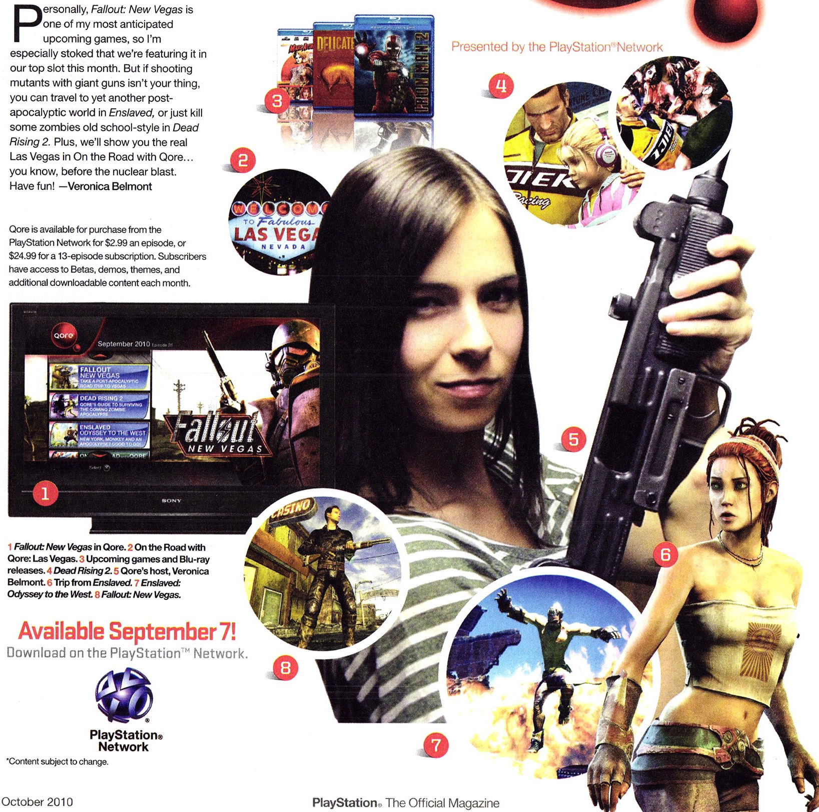
Qore Episode 28

Qore's Guide to the Apocalypse

Personally, *Fallout: New Vegas* is one of my most anticipated upcoming games, so I'm especially stoked that we're featuring it in our top slot this month. But if shooting mutants with giant guns isn't your thing, you can travel to yet another post-apocalyptic world in *Enslaved,* or just kill some zombies old school-style in *Dead Rising 2.* Plus, we'll show you the real Las Vegas in On the Road with Qore… you know, before the nuclear blast. Have fun! —**Veronica Belmont**

Qore is available for purchase from the PlayStation Network for $2.99 an episode, or $24.99 for a 13-episode subscription. Subscribers have access to Betas, demos, themes, and additional downloadable content each month.

Presented by the PlayStation®Network


qore
September 2010 Episode 28
FALLOUT NEW VEGAS
TAKE A POST-APOCALYPTIC ROAD TRIP TO VEGAS
DEAD RISING 2
QORE'S GUIDE TO SURVIVING THE COMING ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE
ENSLAVED ODYSSEY TO THE WEST
NEW YORK, MONKEY AND AN APOCALYPSE? GOOD TO GO!
ON ... AD WITH QORE
Select
Fallout NEW VEGAS
SONY
1
2
WELCOME TO Fabulous LAS VEGAS NEVADA
3
DELICATE
IRON MAN 2
4
5
6
7
8
CASINO

1 *Fallout: New Vegas* in Qore. 2 On the Road with Qore: Las Vegas. 3 Upcoming games and Blu-ray releases. 4 *Dead Rising 2.* 5 Qore's host, Veronica Belmont. 6 Trip from *Enslaved.* 7 *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West.* 8 *Fallout: New Vegas.*

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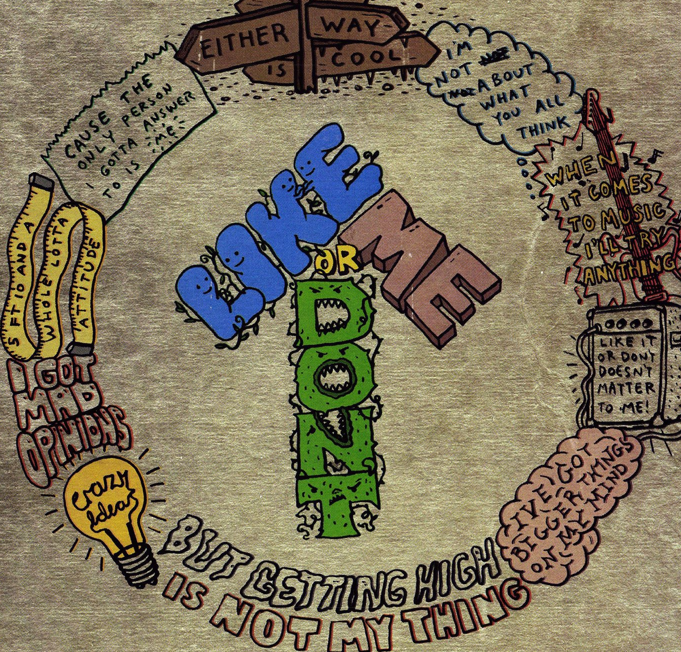
*Content subject to change.


LIKE ME OR DONT
EITHER WAY IS COOL
I'M NOT ~~NOT~~ ~~NOT~~ ABOUT WHAT YOU ALL THINK
WHEN IT COMES TO MUSIC I'LL TRY ANYTHING
LIKE IT OR DON'T DOESN'T MATTER TO ME!
I'VE GOT BIGGER THINGS ON MY MIND
BUT GETTING HIGH IS NOT MY THING
crazy ideas
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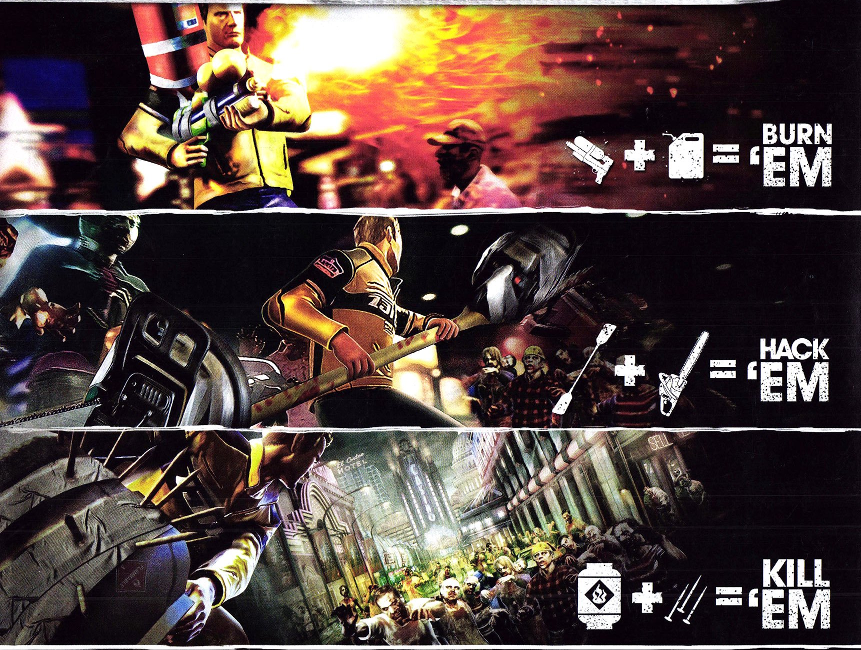

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